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Fiction (Amer.)

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MICKEY PECK

A NOVEL

By ORVILLE ELDER

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MICKEY PECK

CHAPTER I.

He looked as if he might have sprung into existence right there at the base of that great building —a little chunk of saucy humanity braced against a background of gray granite. Six stories over his head the great structure reared itself and, on tip toes, he looked to see the top of it. A pedestrian moved by. The boy sprang to his side. "Shine? Shine 'em up, sir; only a nick, better have a shine!" he said, trotting along by the side of the unwilling gentleman. Finally the little fellow moved back to his corner, hovering at the heels of another man to whom he was repeating his appeal.

"Haven't a red cent on earth," the second person condescended to say to our little friend.

"Draw on your heavenly treasures!" suggested a flossy haired, rather gorgeously attired woman, who at that moment passed near them.

"Who's that?" inquired the gentleman, pausing and glancing back after the woman.

"That's Lil—have a shine, sir?"

"Well, she's pretty gay, isn't she?"

"Have a shine? Only a nick!" The boy was already on his knees rolling up his customer's pantaloons.

"This seems to be a case of hold-up," the gentleman smilingly admitted. "Well, kid, you'll have to stand me off till tomorrow morning."

"Aw, that's all right!" replied the lad, as he rubbed the polish into the shoe leather with his fingers.

"What's your name?" continued the gentleman.

"Mickey Peck."

"Is that lady that just passed a friend of yours?"

"Sometimes yes and sometimes no. One day she tosses me a dollar and says, 'Mickey, go have a time, see?' and then another time she comes along an' kicks my box out into the road, slaps me on the jaw an' calls me a measly brat. This is a mighty fine pair of shoes you wears."

"This is your stand here, is it?"

"Yep."

"Make much money here?"

"Sometimes more and sometimes not so much."

Mickey scraped every particle of mud from the man's shoes, applied the polish to them and then brushed furiously while the patent leather shine was evolved. He bent down and blew his hot breath against the leather and then brushed again while the shoes took on an added luster.

"There you are, sir!" he said, and the gentleman felt in his pockets and drew out a quarter. The boy found a ten-cent piece and a five-cent piece in his pockets and then fumbled, apparently in a frenzied effort, to find another nickel.

"Keep the rest of the change," said the man, "my time is worth more than the money." And he hastened away while Mickey turned again to give his attention to other possible customers.

"Have a shine, sir?" he spoke politely to a well dressed man who moved by.

"Here, high water, let me put a little varnish on your hoofs!" A roughly dressed individual glanced back severely toward Mickey but the reproof hardly pricked the surface of the boy's conscience.

Many came and went and some stopped and patronized the lad.

"Here, boy, you're ten cents shy on my change," said one.

"Oh, 'scuse me!" said Mickey, and he produced the dime.

"This is a three-cent piece instead of a dime, kid, you'd better come up with about seven cents more," another gentleman remarked, when Mickey handed him a dime and an old style three-cent piece, then still in circulation, as balance due out of a quarter.

"That's what?" said our excessively surprised little shoe shiner; "some feller has worked that onto me."

So they came and went and after a while Mickey's deceptive three-cent pieces were all gone.

A colored boy came rushing down the street pursued by two larger white boys. Mickey saw them, threw off his hat, tossed his box into the gutter and made ready for the oncoming group.

"Stop, Sam!" said Mickey, as the black fellow came to the corner. "Stop an' we'll clean 'em out."

On came the white boys; one of them right into Mickey who, with deft skill, implanted a good strong blow on the fellow's nose and another on his ear. By that time the surprised pursuer had begun an active offensive system of hostilities himself, and young Master Mickey was touched rather roughly on the face several times before his combatant was compelled to retreat with the other white boy, who had not lasted long in a single handed conflict with the negro.

"Dey chased me away from de cornder of Eighteent and Market," the black boy explained, while Mickey who had fared much more disastrously than his comrade wiped the trickling blood from his nose and rubbed at a bruised spot on his forehead.

"Does they own the town?" Mickey asked.

"Dat's what I was wonderin'," said the negro.

"Say, do y' think they care for me leanin' up agin this buildin' of theirn while I spills this juice?" Mickey asked, as he leaned back against the stone structure and pushed his head out to allow the slowly dripping blood an uninterrupted course from his nose to the pavement. "Git me my kit!" he continued, pointing to his boot-black outfit lying at the side of the walk.

The negro got the box and came and stood by Mickey's side. "Shine, have a shine, sir?" our little friend sputtered between drips.

"What's the matter, buddy?" a young man asked, pausing in response to the boot-black's call, and the tone of his voice indicated a real sympathetic interest in Mickey's condition.

"No matter, just blood!" responded Mickey.

"He got pounded up by a bigger feller dan him," explained the negro.

"What was the trouble?" continued the young man.

"Have a shine? Better have a shine! Give him a patent leather there, Sam." And the negro fell to upon the shoes of the inquirer.

"Dere was a couple of mugs what was tryin' to chase me out of town and dey gits after me and I hoofs it down dis way an' Mickey he falls in wid me an' we gives 'em a warm show," explained the colored boy.

"Scrape the mud off that heel there!" said Mickey.

"Are you and the kid there friends?" asked the young man, addressing the negro.

"Dis is de fust time I ever knowed him so well," continued the negro; "he always give me the short stare before."

"Aw, I was busy," interrupted Mickey; "blow your breath on that toe, Sam; the gent may be goin' to see his fairy."

"No, I'm not on the butterfly hunt this morning," laughed the patron as he handed Mickey a quarter.

Mickey took the quarter with a polite "Thank you, sir," and trotted away by the side of another pedestrian with "Say, have a shine? Only a nick!" He glanced back toward the waiting young man, who stood looking after him with a surprised look on his face. Mickey dodged around a corner and in a few moments returned to find the coast clear and his victim gone. The darkey was still there.

"Was the guy sore?" asked Mickey.

"Naw, didn' said a word," said Sam, "only he axed me erbout if you was here every noon an' I says: 'nix; he changes off with sum odder feller termorrer an' de nex day wid sum odder feller and maybe in a munt or two he'll be back on dis cornder ergin fer a day—an' de feller he jist gits on a car an' ducks."

"You're all right, Sam. Say, where's yer kit?"

"Dey swipes it—dem two mugs."

"Hain't you nothin' to go to work with?"

"Nix—dey cleaned me.."

"Aw, you got the price, hain't you?"

"Nix, I'm done busted flat!"

"Say, is that so! Where was the cop?"

"He was two blocks down wid his head stuck through a winder chinnin' a buff colored queen."

Mickey dropped his kit to the pavement, rammed his hands into his pockets and drew out his tiny

collection of earnings. He counted it over carefully and discovered that he had in pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters, two dollars and thirty-eight cents. Then he began a series of mental calculations that was distracting.

"Twenty-five cents for room rent," said he; "thirty cents for three meals; forty cents for me an' Piggy to de show tonight—how much does that make, Sam?"

"String it off agin, I was off gau'd," replied the negro.

"Twenty-five cents for a bunk, thirty cents for three squares, forty cents for the variety, an' fifty cents for a layer on my shoe—I'm touchin' bottom with my hoof. How much is that?"

"Four dollars an' steen cents. Gol, you lives high, Mickey!"

"Say, I hain't got that much, Sam; I think you lost count there. Here, now, hol' your hand."

The negro stretched out his pale palm. "There," said Mickey, laying a quarter into the outstretched hand, "there is twenty-five cents for sleepin'—come up with your other mit!" The darkey lifted his other hand. Mickey dropped three dimes into it. "Thirty cents for beans, butter and buns," he said, and then he dropped on his knees beside his box and laid three dimes and two nickels in one pile and a quarter and five nickels in another with, "forty cents for me and Piggy and the show an' fifty cents for my flat wheel. Why, Sam, I've got a whole handful left!" he said, rattling the remaining coins under the negro's nose, "an' say, that starts you up again, see?"

"No! honest?"

"Sure! and let's make a shoot up here and see what's left."

The boys went along the street and Mickey listened to the negro while he told him of his many troubles with the white boot-blacks. "Fatty Grip says all I lack is a tail, to be a monkey," explained Sam, "an' he says dey ain' goin' to have any monkey shines in dis ward."

"Is that so!" said Mickey, "I'd like to know when Pus Grip was 'lected alderman in this precinct. Spose he'll be firin' the mayor some of these days!"

"Dat's what! I don't tink de Govener's job's safe when Fat's around."

"Wonder if the cops don't tip Pus, an' that's the way they hold's their jobs."

"I tink he gits letters from de President every week," continued Sam, as they approached his stand.

The negro boy had a stationary chair mounted on a little platform in which were little drawers for his tools and a short investigation showed that his assailants had appropriated everything that could handily be transported. Mickey and Sam repaired to a neighboring store and purchased the necessary re-opening stock after which Mickey took his leave of the colored boy, but not without listening to voluble thanks from his debtor and repeated assurances that he should be repaid.

"You just let it go till I touches you, see? An' say, Sam, if them mugs gets after you again, you paddle down my way." And Mickey, swinging his box and whistling, moved back toward his own quarters. A few blocks down he met a policeman leisurely moving along. "That's the cop that steps

off Sam's corner," mused Mickey, "wonder if a talk would help the nigger any."

"Hello, kid," said the policeman. "What was the rip down along here a while ago? I saw nigger Sam tripping a pretty gay march along this row with a couple of white kids taggin' the rear."

"They was tryin' to run him out," explained Mickey; "they says no nigger can work in their ward, so they swipes his coin and his kit an' gives him the chase."

"Oh, ho!" commented the policeman, "I'll look a little out around there myself."

"Much obliged!" replied Mickey.

"You and the nigger are friends, are you?"

"We just got acquainted awhile ago. You see he was shooting past me and I tells him to draw in and we'll meet the push. Well, on they comes and I takes one and he takes the tother and we has a soiree."

"Well, you'd better trot along and find a little water for your face—it's bloody."

Mickey moved on down the street and turned in at the side door of a cheap restaurant. The floor was sprinkled with sawdust; little tables were scattered about the room and around many of them were besotted looking men who sleepily bent over beaded glasses of a pale beverage. From the rear came heavy odors of onions and frying meats and from the fore part of the room, separated by a low, thin partition, drifted clouds of smoke and sounds of coarse laughter and boisterous words.

CHAPTER II.

A crushed piece of God's handiwork, a crippled pencil seller, moved down a long dirty alley giving no heed to the squalor and filth through which he passed. He was a sad-faced lad, with one leg drawn up until the knee was almost on a line with his hip. The useless limb swung from side to side as the boy plodded along on a single crutch. Hunger was branded in his sinking cheeks, and physical torture was the mapped verdict of his every feature. He turned into a tall, tumbling house and hobbled painfully down a long hall. As he went, he glanced in at open doors and caught glimpses of half naked children rolling upon dirt besmeared floors and heard the shrill cries of impatient women.

"Piggy, Piggy!" an impudent imp called after him.

"Crippetty croppetty crip!" another shouted and still another cried: "There goes One Leg. Hi, One Leg, want to run a race?"

Heedless of the taunting cries, or with a stony indifference to them, the crippled boy plodded on until he came to a rough basement stair and then with extreme caution he wriggled down over the coarse plank steps. Below, he went a few feet and turned into a narrow room, dark save for the little light that stole in through the entrance door. An old box and a gunny sack were the furnishings of this room and upon the box the boy squatted and sat for a time enjoying, if such a word means anything in such a place, the needed rest. He dug down into his pockets and from their depths brought

up three pennies. In one hand he grasped a bundle of cheap pencils and he looked at the brown coins with almost tearful anguish.

"Tree cents!" he muttered, "tree cents for a day on de street! Tree cents fer pencils an' de world uses millins uv um!"

A heavy step sounded on the stairway and a stooped form pushed through the door, obscuring all light for a few seconds, and then a coarse featured old man took the seat that the crippled boy instantly vacated.

"What luck, Pig?"

"Tree pennies," responded the lad as he leaned against the cold wall for support.

The old man was half ready to curse. He rose as if to strike the trembling cripple. The little ray of dusky light shone upon the poor boy's fearful face and a spark of sympathy flashed in the heart of the brute. He turned and ashamed of his own weakness stumbled up the dark stairs and along the deep hall.

The boy sat again upon the box and in the surprise of unexpected tenderness allowed a few tears to course down into the hollows of his cheeks. He spread himself out upon the box and fell into a restless slumber from which he was awakened suddenly by the sound of quick steps above and soon a small form dodged in through the door, and lo! it was Mickey. Mickey had met the cripple the day before, and having introduced himself by purchasing a pencil, entered into conversation with him and accompanied him to his cellar home.

"Hello, Piggy!" said Mickey, as soon as his eyes were adjusted to the darkness of the cellar and he distinguished the form of the cripple boy on the box.

"Hello—I've forgot yer name."

"Mickey Peck—just call me Mick, that's good. How are you today?"

"It was a bad day. De peoples passed me up. Tree pennies was all I got."

"Three pennies!" Mickey spoke it with disgust. "Why I made three dollars!"

"Tree dollars in one day! tree hundred pennies?"

"Yes, sir, but I've got the stand you know. If you was up where I am you could make stuff too. I tell you what, you've got to move up my way tomorrow."

"Aw, but it's so far an' whin night comes I can't git back."

"You come up tomorrow and I'll keep you all night with me, and when you git ready to come home you'll have the price two times. Any visitors ever come down here to see y' besides me?"

"Naw, not many; dis is too dark a hole fer visitors."

"You don't forgot what I told you yisterday about goin' to the show, do you?" asked Mickey.

"Naw, I've bin tinkin bout dat all day, only I didn' spec you'd be back. Der was a bird down dis way a week er two ergo an' she said she'd be back the nex' day, but she didn' come. She guv me some paper with readin' on it."

"Humph!" said Mickey, contemptuously, "paper with readin' on is awful fillin' to the stummick, ain't it?"

"An' she said, 'Be good fer the Lord's sake,' but I don' know who she's talkin' about an' I asked her, 'who's he?' an' she says, 'he takes care of you an' me all the time, littl' boy. He cares for the little burds an' flowers. He watches over them all de day

an' night. He's our Savur'. Den I tol' her de feller hadn' never been down here 'tall."

"Yep, that's the same ol' guff," said Mickey. "I meets one of dem old girls one day and she gives me the same song. She says: 'Do good for the Lord's sake,' and I says: 'I hain't lookin' out for no entire strangers, it's all I can do to take care of myself.' An' she says: 'my boy, you shouldn't talk that way,' and she asked me if I wouldn't come to her meetin' at two o'clock Sunday afternoon, and I tells her: 'nit: I'm dated for Barney Smitt's gardens where I can roll in the grass and look up at the sky and smell flowers and beer and every good thing all mixed up:' an' she says: 'that's a wicked place and you shouldn't go there,' an' I told her to go 'long; she couldn't give me no bum steer. I *know* what Barney's place is."

"Ye don' know dis feller what dey talks erbout?"

"Nix, he don' live on earth, Piggy. That's religun, y' know, an' this ain' no place for religun—not a place like this. Religun is just made for folks what has soft beds, that's what Nick Delaney says."

Heavy steps were heard on the stairway and they proved to be the steps of the old man who had called earlier. The brute was drunk. "Pig," he sputtered, as he stumbled through the doorway, "Pig, come up with the coin!"

"Hello, grizzle!" shouted Mickey.

Piggy hobbled to the old man and dropped the three pennies into the outstretched hand and then shied toward the door.

"Three stinkin' reds!" the old man muttered, and as the insignificance of the amount began to dawn upon him his anger rose. "Three stinkin' reds!

three stinkin' reds! damn it, ye brat, I'll crush yer dirty frame!" He lunged toward Piggy, who hobbled toward the door as quickly as possible.

Mickey grabbed the box and with all his power threw and pushed it against the old man's head sinking him in a thunderous collapse to the floor.

"Shoot up the stairs, Piggy," called Mickey, as he leaped through the door, slammed it shut and stood, his shoulder pressing heavily against it. Within he heard the old man scrambling in the darkness and Mickey knew that in but a few seconds he would throw his body against the door and burst it open.

Piggy had barely made half the upward journey when the onslaught came; but the old man fell with but half his force the first time and Mickey was able to withstand the pressure. The second time, however, as Mickey had anticipated, the angry brute came with full power against the door and Mickey leaped away, allowing the drunken wretch to sprawl flat upon the hard rough floor. Half dazed he slowly rose to resume his pursuit of the boys. Piggy had now reached the top of the stairs.

"Chase on out an' up toward Olive, Piggy, I'll hold old whiskers off till you get a start!" shouted Mickey, and Piggy hobbled hastily, and with a doubly whitened face, through the long hall.

"Hi, One Leg, want to run a race?" he heard called after him. Mickey, at the top of the stair, stood looking into the shadows of the cellar. He glanced once to see if Piggy were yet out into the street. No, he had not gone half the way down the hall and below the cursing brute of a man had gathered himself together and was starting up the stair.

Mickey looked anxiously about him. A few steps away stood a slop pail filled with slimy refuse from a dozen dirty rooms. It was a huge pail, almost as big as Mickey, but he sprang toward it and using all his strength he dragged it to the top of the stairs and dumped the rotten filth down over the upward pressing victim. He jammed his doubled hands into the grime and scooped it out into the face of the poor brute who was now half way up the stairs. He gathered a half rotten apple and with a swing flung it into the old man's bosom. The missile with a dull dash splattered up into the already dripping beard and then our pitiless lad with a chuckle of delight turned the remaining filth of the bucket out upon the steps and it trickled in nasty streams down to mingle with the shadows of the cellar. Still the old man pressed upward and finally, Mickey, with a push, rolled the immense bucket down amongst the unsteady pedals of Piggy's enemy who tumbled back into the basement while the streams of foul refuse flowed over and about him.

Mickey, now assured that his little cripple friend had had time to get away from danger, turned and scampered after him while a host of curious tenants rushed to the stairway and with their fingers pressed to their noses peered down upon their distressed neighbor.

CHAPTER III.

"Get out of the way, here comes the perfumery wagon!" called Mickey, as he ran up to Piggy, his fingers spread wide apart and his hands held as far from his nose as was possible. "Whew! take a bite of that," he continued, extending one of the same hands toward the shrinking cripple.

"I was afraid he'd kill ye," said Piggy, ignoring Mickey's unclean appearance.

"Oh, ho!" laughed Mickey, "I fixed him. He'll have to be scraped before the health officers will let him show up on the street. I dumped the perfumery bucket on him." And then, at the remembrance of the scene, Mickey doubled himself in laughter. "Aw, you ought to seen him, Piggy; he looked like a sewer drag. Honest, yes! he looked as if he'd took a high dive into a slop jug."

"He'll brain me!"

"Honest, will he?"

"Yep, he'll git me sure."

"No! Say, who is he?"

"He's my grandad."

"Shoo! say, you're joshin', ain't you?"

"Naw, dats no joke! he's my grandad an' I ain't got nowhere else ter live. He'll be waitin' fer me tonight an' he'll giv' me wuss dan hell."

"Gosh, that's tough! Say, you'd better stay up town tonight."

"Yep, I'll do dat, I kin sleep anywher."

The boys had wandered along the street until they came to a watering trough. Mickey plunged his hands into the water and with much rubbing

finally got them into their normal condition of semi-cleanness. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Does I look like a feller dat is ober fed?" was Pig's reply.

"Let's go up this way a little farther. I know a place where we can load up cheap. Do you like beans?"

"Beans! Say, does I look like a feller dat ud turn down a plate of beans?"

"Do you like pie?"

"Pie! Say does I look like a feller dat ud kick on a slice of pie. Nit. Say, I likes anything."

"Do you like pepper-sauce and ice-cream?"

"What do it taste like?"

"Aw, about like my 'mits' smelt awhile ago."

"Naw, I guess I don' like pepper-sauce an' ice-cream, but I likes ingins."

"Do you like liver?"

"Yep, I likes liver fine."

"Say, Piggy, we'll have liver tied up in ingins for supper; what you say?"

Piggy shook his head sadly and his crutch kept rough time on the stone pavement with the one, two, of Mickey's feet. "What! don't you want liver and ingins?" said Mickey, "Well, we can eat something else."

"Aw, they's good," continued Piggy, "but I's broke—de old man took me pennies."

"Yes, but this is my banquit," interposed Mickey. —"It's on me, see? I stand the cost. The lay-out's mine. I'm doin' the blow."

"Dat's diffrint," responded Piggy, and he quickened the spring of his sound foot while the heavy crutch more rapidly hammered the dully reverberating pavement and a pale, half-doubtful smile

crouched on his pallid face.

Swiftly moving business men turned and glanced curiously at the odd couple moving nearer and nearer to the heart of the great city. "It's a long way, ain't it, Piggy?" suggested Mickey.

"Yep, but it's a purty way. I likes to git up inter town."

"Well, here's the place. You just make a run for one of dem stools and I'll give this guy at the door a talk."

They entered a long room fitted up with a large lunch counter, around which were revolving stools, toward two of which Piggy pressed his way among a mass of moving men and boys, while Mickey stopped at the cashier's stand. "Say, mister," said he, "what you going to tax me and my pardner for all we can carry on the inside?"

"——and ten is sixty, thank you. Come again. What's that, kid?—seventy-five and twenty-five is a dollar. Correct!" The cashier was returning change to his customers, as they made their payments.

"I say, what you goin' to charge us for fillin' our lunch bags—me and my pardner?"

"Was that—yes you'll find a wash stand to the left there—Was that your partner—thirty and twenty is a half, thanks! Was that your partner, kid, that cripple that just came in?—Yes, sir, we are open all night."

"Yep, we just wants a little lunch to hold us 'till after the show."

"Five and five are ten, thank you—Stand back where I can get a fair squint at you, boy—thirty and twenty is a half. Call again!"

Mickey backed out where the cashier could get a

good view of him. "Cigars? On the other side, sir. What is your girth measure, sonny?—fifteen and ten is twenty-five!"

"I measure sixteen inches blowed up," replied Mickey.

"Yes, sir, we charge extra for two pieces of pie—twenty-five and twenty-five is a half. Thank you, call again—Cigars? On the other side, sir. Found a fly in the soup? Sorry, sir; accidents will happen, a fellow found two in a biscuit at the Bon Ton the other day—thirty and twenty is a half, and fifty is one."

"I measure sixteen inches when I'm stuffed," Mickey repeated in an anxious effort to hold the attention of the cashier.

"Post office? Two blocks east, nine north—A five! twenty-five and seventy-five is one and four is five—call again. Yes, sir, we have a good trade here. Show? Good one in the Union tonight—'Barnes' Babies'—it's a killer—sixty and fifteen is seventy-five. Come again."

"Hey, I measure sixteen inches when I'm onflated."

"Is that so, bubby?—Twenty-five and twenty-five is a half. Well, if you stand there much longer you'll be small enough to skin the cat in a garter—Yes, sir, ten cents is all we charge for bean soup. Ice cream? I think so—ask that fellow with the handle on his nose—that's him. Kid, it will cost you twenty-five cents to load the cripple and you can pay for all you eat—fifteen and ten is a quarter."

"Thanks awfully, you'll die of liberation of the stomach some day," said Mickey as he pressed toward the stool reserved for him by Piggy.

"Did you think I was buying out the joint?" he asked.

"Der ain't no push, I was jist fillin' up me nose wid de smell ob de vegtibels."

"Hey, you fellow!" Mickey called to a sleepy waiter, "shoot in a few loads of grub."

"Well, what y' 'ave?"

"Liver smothered in ingins for two."

"Double on the choked!" the waiter bawled into a hole in the wall.

"Double on the choked!" came back the muffled echo.

Soon the liver and the onions came and the odor was pleasant to the two boys. Through the brown, juicy, sliced onions they caught glimpses of a layer of black liver and the crippled boy with a fierceness born of desperate hunger fell upon the unprotesting food. Mickey with more deliberation attended to his own wants and watched with amazement while the cripple, dead to all else, as Mickey said, "fed his face."

"Say, you was pretty hungry!" commented Mickey when the last black scrap of onion had disappeared from Piggy's plate.

"Hungry! Say, I'm always hungry. I've never had 'nough ter eat, not onct in me life."

"Hey, Reddy, you fellow—this kid wants some more liver and ingins."

"Single on the choked!" the waiter shouted.

"Single on the choked!" dully echoed again, while the crippled boy leaned back and drew a long breath.

"What you want to drink?" asked Mickey.

"Aw, water's good."

"Hey, Reddy, git this kid two glasses of milk."

The milk was brought to Piggy, as was the second plate of liver and onions and they were all devoured, and even more, before the little fellow was stuffed to his capacity, then, with two checks grasped in his hands Mickey approached the cashier while Piggy hobbled out to the street.

"There's the kid's check," Mickey said, dropping a seventy-five cent ticket on the desk before the cashier.

"What! did that imp eat that much?" the fellow asked, glancing out through the window toward Piggy.

"Yep, for a quarter," replied Mickey, and he laid a twenty-five cent piece upon the seventy-five cent check.

"Well, come up with your own!" said the cashier, and Mickey after carefully feeling in his pockets, drew out a dime and a nickel and handed them with a fifteen-cent check to the astonished treasurer who, with an angry flourish, raked the money into the drawer, tossed the checks aside and said: "Get on out of here as quick as you can!"

"Dat mus' have cost twenty-five pennies," suggested Piggy, as Mickey joined him.

"Twenty-six," explained Mickey, and they trudged along the street, more slowly than before for they were dazed. Their little bodies were filled nigh unto bursting and the sleepiness of satisfaction was bearing down upon them.

"I cud go ter sleep to a fire," muttered Piggy.

"The 'hurry up' cart tearing down Broadway with me on the inside wouldn't keep me from nappin'," continued Mickey; "but say, Piggy, we mustn't go to sleep before the show; we're going to the show, you know."

"Naw, is we? Ain' yer blowin' too strong?"

"Nix, I'm going easy."

It was nearly night time. The lights were bursting out from shops and stores and the alleys were deep lines of darkness. Men moved slowly along the streets with papers held close to their eyes in an earnest effort to learn the particulars of a recent murder. Ladies and gentlemen strolling leisurely, paused to look into glittering windows and comment upon the displays. The bustle and confusion of hurried day was gone and the more restful night was approaching.

"Aw, but I'm noddy," muttered Piggy.

"Gosh, but my stomach is tired," commented Mickey. They shuffled along, Piggy, lazily dragging his crutch over the sanded walk; Mickey, pushing his feet forward with a reluctant effort.

At the corner of a high building an outside stairway coursed up to the upper stories. Mickey and Piggy paused at the foot and glanced up. All was darkness and silence above. They drowsily ascended a few steps and then settled side by side on the stairs and leaning one against the other rolled off into slumberland. The fire chief driving a span of grays at full gallop and clanging a shrill bell at every leap of his team drove through the street right under the noses of the sleeping urchins. The engine, puffing great volumes of black smoke and throwing out flashes of lurid light, rolled by. The hoofs of the eight horses and the heavy wheels of the vehicles made a bedlam of noises but the world-dead street lads slept on undisturbed. Mickey stirred a little in his sleep—a cramped foot was giving him pain: he pushed it out and it dropped through the railings of the stairs and hung in mid-

air over the deserted alley. A hand flapped into Piggy's lap and the cripple started, muttered "tree pennies" tremulously and all was silent again for many moments.

Slowly the streets cleared. One by one the night prowlers wearily faded away. Lights went out until there were but a few remaining to cast shadows over Mickey and Piggy. They were indeed in the shadows of shadowland. Not a sound stirred the air save the heavy breathing of Mickey and the startled little snores of the cripple. Long past midnight Mickey stirred again, the pressure of a rough board on his back made him uneasy and he threw his body forward. He swung back and forth as if in an effort to balance himself and then dropped forward and rolled over and would have tumbled to the ground had not his foot caught in the railings and held him, head downward, a dazed and mystified urchin clawing at the rough steps. Finally he pulled himself up, dislodged his foot and sat bewildered, trying to reason himself into an intelligent consciousness.

He crept closer and looked carefully at his companion and then he remembered it all and with a shake at the body of the cripple he shouted: "Piggy, Piggy, wake up, we must hurry to the show!"

Piggy's journey from dreamland was slow and it required much encouragement from Mickey to keep him from taking another nap, but after a time he was near enough awake to protest against being fully awakened.

"But we must hurry up or we'll be too late for the show," insisted Mickey, and with that his little friend assured him that he did not care for the show. But Mickey was not to be so easily put off;

he compelled Piggy to follow him down the stairs and they stepped out into the street and stood half doubled in sleepy amazement, looking up and down along the broad pathway. But a single living creature was in sight, a solitary blue coat moving slowly toward them swinging his club and humming an old love tune.

"Wher' is we?" asked Piggy.

"Dun no!" responded Mickey as he studied carefully every little feature of the locality—"Oh! yes I do. We are five blocks from Nick Delaney's where I bunk. Come, let's duck, it must be bedtime."

A few steps and they met the policeman. "Where you kids been?" he asked.

"Sleepin'—what time is it?" replied Mickey.

"About two-thirty—where were you napping?"

"Back on them long stairs there—me and the crip here."

"Well, chase on along now and get off the streets."

"Good night, sir," said Mickey.

"Good morning, laddy," replied the policeman with a smile.

"I wonner if de show woz good?" observed Piggy, with a muffled yawn.

"It's always good," replied Mickey, "but it's out now."

Through the long streets they moved like two night rats in the eclipsed foot paths of a lumber yard. The tall buildings towered above them mountain like and the shadowy prowlers crept close to the protecting walls.

"Dis makes a feller feel creepy," said Piggy.

"Oh, this is nothin'," explained Mickey, "wait till you get to the tunnel."

There were many secret things hidden about in drawers and boxes in this room. In fact it was not a notably reputable place and went under the insinuating title, "The Joint," among various young men who were often found glancing over the display on the news stand. Three of such young men soon entered. "Hello, Nick!" they shouted, and the proprietor of The Joint responded with a husky, "Good morning, boys," and then leaned over, one hand resting upon the counter, and gave himself up to a fit of coughing.

"Still barking a little," suggested one of the young men, a slender boy of medium height, light hair and a thin, straggly mustache, which he fingered very frequently in the never successful effort to curl the points into a wax end.

"Yes," replied Nick, "it's a stayer, this bark of mine. I'd give fifty golden plunks if I could relegate it into the eternal hence this moment."

"There's a way," advised another of the newly arrived, who had seated himself on a tobacco kit and was turning over the pages of a paper-backed book entitled, "Shadow Street."

"Yes," admitted Nick, "there's a way, there's a way—but the climatic change—I couldn't stand that. How was the night, Pink?"

Pink was the third of the young men, a brown haired individual, full faced, well built, and neatly dressed.

"Oh, fairly good," he replied, "I touched a guy for twenty and he never whimpered. He's on his way to 'Frisco now, none the wiser."

"There'll be a sad awakening though," said Nick.

"Yes, about now, maybe, he's counting and recounting his little bundle of paper trying to call up

the ghost of his departed twenty. Well, I needed it. I haven't made a really good haul since last fall when the Exposition people were here. Say, there was a tribe of jays! Bite? Why they swallowed hook, bobber and everything. Fifty dollars a day was easy for me. There was a season of sunshine, eh, Kid?" He turned to the young man who was seated and reading from the pages of "Shadow Street."

"Eh, what did you say, Pink?" Kid asked, aroused from the study of the story.

"Wasn't that Exposition gang an easy push?"

"Well I guess, yes! we ran four extra faro tables all through it and there wasn't a let up on the deal for three weeks. It just about killed me. Why I got so they had to lift me out of my chair. Thirty hour sittings is too much for me. Where were you at that time, Burt?" Kid asked, addressing the young man of the troublesome mustache.

"I was on the capital P-I-G," replied the young fellow, twitching nervously at his lip ornament. "Yes, I was beautifully on the hog, two hundred miles away from Sunshineville and getting home by degrees; beating my way on blinds and boxes. I was ditched in more towns than there is in this state. That was a tough summer for me." Pink winked at Kid. Burt continued: "I struck some of the slowest towns on earth that trip. Many and many a place I was dumped in I didn't see a woman I knew, not a one. They wouldn't even grin when I flagged 'em; just sailed right along with their eyes straight ahead and never seen me at all. It was tough! I remember one town I was in in Iowa, Pleasant Plain, or Gleesome Valley, or Merry Junction; some such name, anyway, and I

was walking around mighty despondent like, for there wasn't a train out until midnight and that was a fast mail—nothing but mail cars, you know, and them mail agents watch the 'blinds' pretty close. Well, I was walking around through Gleesome Junction and I sees a fair looking female on a corner and I waltzes up to her, topples my hat and says: 'why, good evening, hain't I seen you somewheres?' and she says: 'Maybe you did, I was there once,' and I says: 'Oh, ho, you're not so slow,'—'An' you're plenty swift,' she replied, 'an' if it's me you're lookin' for you'd better "duck" for I'm waitin' for a big fireman that'll fill you full of surprises if he catches you chinnin' me,' and with that she jerks herself around with her back to me and I lights out, for I hain't lost no fireman. I was there for a day and a half and didn't get acquainted with a woman."

"You was playing in pretty tough luck," suggested Nick, who was brushing the dust from various of his wares and arranging them into a grotesque uniformity on the shelves.

"Tough luck!" continued Burt; "why it wasn't luck at all; it was worse than bad luck—hello! Sissy."

A young woman had entered the store and Nick hastened forward to wait on her. She was a brunette of medium height, striking in form and withal rather pretty. At Burt's salutation she glanced half angrily at him and replied: "You ain't fresh nor nothin'." The girl made her purchase of a few buns and passed out.

"You be a little careful, Burt, who you jolly around here, you may take a header some day," said Nick as he came back toward the boys.

"Don't you think it," was the reply, "I know them people. I could pick 'em out of a funeral procession if they was dressed in mourning and shedding tears by the bottle full. Now there, see that! Howdy do, mamma!"

"Hello chile," a fat colored woman replied as she entered the store.

"Was there something you would like this morning?" asked Nick, addressing the colored woman and interrupting the threatening conversation.

"Yes, Mr. Delaney, has you any buttah?"

"Yes, mam."

"Give me five cents' worth of buttah an' five cents' worth of sugah," and she turned again to Burt, "Why don' you evah come to see me, chile?"

"Cut it!" commanded Nick, as another customer entered the store and the colored woman gathered her parcels in her hands and disappeared.

"Good morning," was Nick's greeting to the new visitor and at the same time he removed his hat from his head and dropped it into a box under the counter. "Can I be of any service to you this morning?"

"I would like a dime's worth of vanilla wafers and fifteen cents' worth of oranges."

The young lady opened a lunch basket which she carried in her hand and placed her purchases therein, paid Nick and thanked him when he assisted her in fastening the lid of her basket. "I am going across the city to spend the day with my aunt," she explained in a voice that was pleasant to hear.

"It is going to be a lovely day," suggested Nick, as he stepped forward and held the screen door open while she passed out. "Call again!"

"Thank you," she replied.

"A neat little maiden!" commented Burt. "Did you notice her shape, Kid?"

Kid was still reading: "The glimmering moon was moving slowly above the horizon just as the brewer's daughter—Eh, what was that, Burt?"

"Aw, go on with your fairy tale," said Burt impatiently, "you miss a good many good things though, don't he, Pink?"

"That's what!" replied Pink, who had confiscated a desk chair and was rather sleepily observing the customers as they came and went. "Who was she, Nick?"

"Don't know—one of the drop-ins."

At that moment a young man entered the store.

"Hello, Gus!" Pink and Nick called to him.

"How are you, boys?" he responded. "How's everything?"

"Oh, so, so," replied Nick, "how are they coming for you?"

"A long ways apart. Got any sow bosom?"

"Plenty of it."

"Carve me off a few slices."

"You and tenderloin not on speaking terms now, Gus?" asked Pink.

"Well, we're not as friendly as we have been. I tell you for a good old long-time, faithful friend, there is nothing more reliable than the breast of the swine. Of course there are times, there have been times rather, when Sade and me et tenderloins whenever we felt like it, see? We're a little on the smoked pig these days."

"When'll you get out?" asked Pink.

"In about two weeks. We join 'Burnam Brothers' at Libertyville. Sade and me are to do our act in the after circus concert, but we don't look for

much out of that. The people are gettin' tired of these cheap 'John' concerts that come on while the men are jerking tent stakes, tearing down seats, and getting ready to pull for the next stand. There was a time when two polished nickel vinegar castors and an old accordion, to be given to the ones holding the lucky tickets, would mean that it was a dead sure thing the concert would be as well attended as the circus, but that time is off; them castors is scattered all through the states and people know what they are. We're going to hit it for all we can, though, this summer. I've got a sure thing for next winter."

"What have you booked for the winter?"

"We're going to make the small towns and give cantatas. You know—Queen Esther, Belshazzar's Feast and all that kind of stuff—give them on the percentage plan all for the benefit of the heathen, Sade and me included on that side, see? We're practicing on them off hours, now. Sade makes a bird of a Queen Esther—she takes to that kind of work like a charm. Once in a while she forgets and wants to throw in a fancy turn or two, but she'll get over that."

"If she should happen to waltz out before a congregation of the elect some day and give them the Queen Esther's dizzy-dazzy, your names would be pantaloons," suggested Pink.

"Oh, we'll get ourselves trained down before we tackle it," continued Gus. "We ain't going to take no chances. Sade ain't no fool; her and me can hold ourselves down for a few weeks and we'll live on the fat of the land—they treat you right, them people do. Won't have to live on no sow bosom. How much was that, Nick?"

"Ten cents; anything else?"

"Yes, give me a package of Sweet Caporals."

"He's safe in any man's town," observed Pink after Gus had gone.

"A cheap mark, though," commented Burt, who had not taken part in the conversation with Gus but had stood looking beyond him out into the street, and twitching at his mustache. "I meets him that same summer we was speaking about a while ago—him and Sade was running a one horse show all by themselves. I was dumped off in a little town and goes up through the main street and who should I see standin' out on the street but this same Gus. He was making a spiel about the headless woman on the inside and the jays was giving up their coin in good shape; then after a while I hears singin' an' Gus tells me 'the head is giving them a song' and he goes on with his spiel. I asked him for a five spot, an' he gives me a quarter and tells me it's all he can spare 'cause him an' Sade was going to Europe that fall. Why, his pockets was full of coin! It does me good to see him scratchin' now—an' he never got to Europe, neither."

CHAPTER V.

After a little while a lull in the business at the front of the store brought Nick to the rear. "Well, boys!" he said, and his tones must have been of special significance, for Kid threw his book aside and they all crowded over to a drawer that Nick had opened.

Their minds were occupied in the study of various swindling schemes and they were all guilty for they talked in low tones and glanced cautiously toward the door as if in fear of the appearance of an enemy, and when Mickey came shuffling through the back way they were startled until one said:

"Oh, it's only little Mick. Hello, Mick, how are you?"

"First rate—I want a pie, Nick."

"All right, buddy. What's that you got piled back there on your bunk?" Nick asked as he walked forward to wait on Mickey.

"A little crip that I got mixed up with yesterday. Say, you ought to seen us last night, Nick! You see we goes an' gets a lunch, Crip an' me, and after we had stuffed ourselves up to the safety valve we throws in a few more layers an' that makes us dead sleepy, so we gets out and hoofs it around the bully-vards awhile and then crawls up a pair of stairs and falls off asleep and didn't wake up till three o'clock this morning, an' I guess we'd been snorin' there yet if I hadn't had some kind of a night horse and started to roll down stairs. That wakes me up an' I stirs Piggy out an' tells him we must make a rush for the show. Well he comes to, an' we drops

down to the street an' meets a cop who says 'good mornin' to us an' tells us it's two-thirty. You bet he filled us full of surprises and we makes a rush for the hive. The crip is still poundin' his ear. Say, what kind of a pie is that one there with the yaller juice leakin' through it?" Mickey was making a close inspection of the pastry case.

"That—" said Nick, taking the pie out and examining it carefully, "that's an apricot pie; no, I believe it's peach. It's a wonder you didn't roll down and break your neck. Shoot it! I don't know what kind of a pie that is—it may be lemon, they're making some lemons with lids on now—yes, it's a wonder you didn't break your darned neck!"

"I might a' if a speeder hadn't got hooked in the stair railin'. Give me that pie, anyway—I'll take chances on it, but I hope it ain't lemon, 'cause lemon pie ain't no good with lids on it. I like my lemon pie an inch thick of lemon and then a foot of froth on top of that. Say, that's the way to take lemon pie."

Mickey paid for the pie and settled down on the corner of a cracker box to devour it while Nick hastened back to his three other customers.

"Say, Nick," called Mickey thickly, "this ain't no lemon pie, an' it ain't aprycot pie neither, ner it ain't peach pie, it's nothin' but common old apple pie. I wish I had my money back—I'd buy a nickel's worth of ginger snaps!"

Nick laughed as did the other boys and then they entered into low absorbing conversation while Mickey with his elbows resting on his knees, his black hands grasping the large pie, his face thrust well into the depths of the coarse edible and his eyes fastened upon the floor ate on in enraptured

silence. He heard a light step on the floor and glanced up. A little girl had entered. Mickey looked at her in speechless amazement. He remembered his experiences of the night and wondered if she were not an apparition and he still asleep on the stair by the side of the great building. She was so beautiful, he thought. Such milk white hands, such creamy cheeks, such masses of curling hair! She wore a dress of many colors, and blue stockings that disappeared into a dainty little pair of gaiters; in her right hand she swung a little blue cap that she had taken from her head as she stepped into the store.

Mickey gazed at her with wide open eyes, while she in return stood watching him. He turned and glanced toward the rear of the store. Nick was engrossed in business with the young men. He was called to the front, though, by a short whistle, or rather a commingled hiss and whistle, given by Mickey, who had lost the power of speech and must in some other manner claim the attention of the proprietor who now hastened forward, while the little girl still stood, her head drooping a little and her eyes glancing out from under long lashes toward Mickey.

"Maybe she is hungry," thought Mickey, and he arose and stepped toward her, pushing out the half eaten pie.

"No, I thank you ever so much," she said, "I have had my breakfast," and then Mickey noticed dark stains on the pie where his black fingers had pressed and he looked at the white hands of the little girl and realized that even were she hungrier than he, she would not touch a morsel over which such filthy hands as his had wandered, and the knowledge came

to him with such power that his heart smarted painfully and under the dusky coating of his cheeks a red flame spread for an instant. Nick laughed a little but it was not a cruel laugh and Mickey moved back to the rear of the store.

"Good morning," Nick said to the little customer.

"Good morning, Mr. Delaney," she replied, "mamma wanted me to get a can of nice pears." Nick brought a can to the counter. "Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed the little one. "Are they as nice as the picture, Mr. Delaney?"

"That is pretty hard to tell, little girl," explained Nick; "but it's a good brand and I am sure your mamma will be pleased with the fruit. Is there anything else?"

"A half pound of tea please."

While Nick was weighing and wrapping the tea, his young customer examined various of his wares with exclamations appropriately expressing her likes and dislikes for the same. "Cod fish! O-o-h isn't it awful! I don't like cod fish, it is so soggy! And what are these, Mr. Delaney?"

"Those are blind robins."

"Do you cook them?"

"No, you just eat them as they are."

"Everything?"

"Yes; head, tail, whiskers and everything."

"Oh, they must be nasty. What nice large oranges!"

"Give her a couple of them, Nick." It was Burt who spoke and at the same time he went toward the little girl. Mickey eyed him suspiciously.

"Oh no, thank you!" she exclaimed, "mamma would not allow me to accept them."

"Yes, but you must," continued Burt, "tell your

mother that Senator Parker's son gave them to you."

"Are you Senator Parker's son?"

"Yes, I am the Senator's only little boy."

Burt had dropped a couple of the oranges into a sack and thrust them into the hands of the little girl, who, with an "I thank you very much, sir," left the store.

"I'll hand you a dime in a day or two, Nick," Burt said, and Nick responded with a rather weak "all right," while Pink winked at Kid and Mickey grinned.

"She didn't want any pie, eh, Mickey?" laughed Nick.

Mickey shook his head and appeared embarrassed.

"Oh, well, that was all right! She knew you were hungry and needed it worse than she did," said Pink sympathetically.

"I don't think she likes pie," said Mickey.

"If she had to get out and rustle for her feed as you do she'd learn not to be so particular," Pink replied.

"But she couldn't earn her own pie, could she?" asked Mickey.

"Hardly, at her age;" admitted Pink; "her dad may have blacked boots when he was your age, though."

"Yes," said Nick, "right across there on the corner in the German National Bank is Chas. E. Kittridge, worth a dozen millions now. He used to sell peanuts on these very streets thirty-five years ago——"

"And look at me," interrupted Burt, "when I was

a kid I used to pick rags and sell them for a living and now I——"

"——pick pockets, with the same object in view," suggested Pink.

"Yes, an' I'm like the fellow that went to Texas with nothin'—I've held my own;" Burt agreed, "but how about you, Pinkey, old boy?"

"I lived in a pen as a boy. They kept me tied down. When I got loose I ran until I touched bottom. I have blowed in several little fortunes and am looking for more. Easy come, easy go. I've never worked any, I never intend to—I'll steal first."

"And you'll never be a rich man," suggested Nick.

"Do you mean, Nick," asked Burt, "that a man can't steal himself rich?"

"That's about it. I don't think it is done, as a rule. I know I've seen a whole host of thieves in my time and not one of them has accumulated a substantial wealth. It's just as Pink has said—easy come, easy go. To know the value of a dollar one must earn it."

"So far as I know, the evidence of all assembled here is in your favor," admitted Pink, and he turned to Kid who was still delving in the mysterious drawer. "Kid, aren't you about through there?"

"Are these the only 'strippers' you've got, Nick?" Kid asked, holding up a deck of cards.

"Yes," replied Nick, "but I've more coming."

"Well, I'll take these, but don't like them very well. Pick me out two or three decks of good ones from your next batch. I'm ready, Pink."

Pink and Kid left the store, Burt following them. Nick leaned over and coughed furiously.

Mickey sat on a kit of tobacco, looking steadfastly at the floor.

"That Pink is pretty smooth," said Nick, straightening up and wiping a few tears from his eyes; "he has a silvery tongue; he can put up a little the best 'con' talk going."

"Burt Craige ain't much, is he?" asked Mickey.

"He's a leech, a bleeder," continued Nick, "a would-be grafter. His work is so blooming coarse that we can't admire any part of it."

At that point another customer entered and Nick went to wait on him. Mickey stepped to the rear door and glanced into his room. Piggy was still lying upon the couch, sleeping soundly.

"I'll have to get out and rustle, Nick," said Mickey, going forward after the customer had gone. I wish you'd give the crip a pie when he wakes up and tell him I'll be back about one o'clock."

"All right," Nick replied, and Mickey turned to go.

"Who was the fairy with the blue socks, Nick?" he asked, looking back.

"The little girl?"

"Yes, the one that don't like pie."

"That girl's home is just three blocks south of here. I don't know her name, but she lives in a big house."

CHAPTER VI.

Business was good this morning and Mickey was kept busy. There was a celebration in one of the parks toward which many of the masses were pressing. Young men would stop, patronize Mickey, hail the cable cars, and roll away westward. The little boot-black thought to follow in the wake of the crowd but remembered Piggy in waiting at Nick's and determined to stay at his post until the business of the day was over, and then return to his hive and see what could be done for the cripple.

The forenoon was well worn away when a young man strolled around to Mickey's corner and saluted him with: "Hello there, you young scamp!" Mickey looked up to him in surprise for it was the same person who had the day before given him a quarter which he had appropriated for the shine given by the negro. Our little friend did not allow an acknowledgment of his confusion to appear on his countenance. He replied:

"Hello, sir! have a shine, sir? Better have a shine—only a ni-ni-nick, sir!"

"I guess I have about four coming, my boy. I've walked all over this part of town to find you."

"Why—ah. I'm here every morning," explained Mickey.

"That black boy told me yesterday that you changed your location every day."

"Sam is one of the biggest liars on these beats," explained the boot-black, dropping upon his knees and beginning work upon the young man's shoes.

"And who is the biggest robber?" the victim of the day before inquired.

Mickey glanced up at his inquisitor and his eyes twinkled mischievously as he replied: "Oh there's several of us that's tied for that place."

"Your shines are worth a dime, but they're hardly worth a quarter," continued the young man. "You do your work well and you can make a living without stealing if you try. It wasn't the loss of twenty cents that started me out to hunt you this morning; it was the wish to see you again and tell you that your principle is a bad one and will never be a winner——"

"Good morning, Mr. Morgan."

Two young women stood right over the kneeling Mickey, their soft dresses rubbed against his bared and dirty elbows; delightful perfumes stole into his nostrils. He surreptitiously rubbed the back of his hand against the hem of a silken skirt and leaned nearer that his cheek might feel the pressure of the vibrating garments. He glanced up. A gloved hand was extended to the young man who had removed his hat and was smiling into the face of a beautiful young woman.

"Why, Miss Stacy! When did you return?"

"Just the day before yesterday and I want you to know that the loneliness of my absence from home was happily broken by reading your delightful little sketches in the *News*. They gave me such pleasure! I must make you acquainted with Mr. Arthur Morgan, cousin," the lady said, turning

to her companion. "My cousin, Miss Burgess, Mr. Morgan."

Mr. Morgan bowed in response to the smiling acknowledgment of Miss Burgess and Miss Stacy continued, speaking to her cousin, "Mr. Morgan writes the 'Street scenes' that you and I have so often laughed and cried over together."

"I think I am honored in knowing a person who can do such marvels with words," responded Miss Burgess. "Is it genius, or work, that does it?"

"May be a little genius, undoubtedly a world of work," explained Miss Stacy. "You must call and see us, Mr. Morgan. Good bye!" The young women passed on, almost unaware of the existence of the little fellow at their feet who had for a few seconds been in ecstasies in breathing the atmosphere about them.

"I always feel, when I meet Mr. Morgan," said Miss Stacy as they moved away, "that I am in the presence of one who knows a great deal about me and all about himself, while I know little about him and almost as little about myself."

"Stacy, Stacy," mused Mickey as he brushed briskly at the shoes; "where have I seen that name? Oh, yes, at the top of those buildings down by the river. 'Stacy Manufacturing Co.' I wonder if that girl can be the daughter of the old guy that sits in that plate glass office and writes his name to thousand-dollar checks!"

"I believe," thought Mr. Morgan, "that she knows the secret of success and will win out for herself. A little genius, whole worlds of work—that is it; that *must* be it!"

Mickey leaned over and blew his breath on the tip of a shoe. "Morgan—Mr. Arthur Morgan—

they talk about him all over town. Writes pieces for the *News*. Gosh, he's somebody!" and the boot-black redoubled his efforts to make the foot covering of the great young man shine in blackness.

"Yes, what I was going to say to you a while ago, kid, about that twenty cents: it isn't the money, it's the principle. You're playing a losing game. What you steal does you no real good. There are no rich thieves; they are poor even if their pockets are jammed with money. It is not theirs and there is an inexorable law that declares that they shall not be benefited by their ill-gotten gains.

"I owe you fifteen cents, don't I?" suggested Mickey feeling carefully in his pockets. Finally he found three nickels and handed them to the young man. "They say," he continued, "that some of them rich ducks that drives around in them new fangled gas carts is just as big thieves as us street kids."

"They say a great many things, some that are true, some that are false. You and I don't know that they speak the truth about these rich 'ducks,' do we?"

"No," admitted Mickey.

"Well, my boy, whenever you see a rich old man who was once a poor boy and became rich through his own efforts, you will see an honest old man. You will see a man who has been economically industrious in his youth and middle age. You will see a man who, when he was a boy, had no better chances than you have today or than I had when I was your age. If some say that he has stolen his wealth, make them prove it. Watch your acquaintances, those that steal for a living, and you

will see that sooner or later they will fall into the hands of a big man with a silver star shining on his breast."

Mickey did not thoroughly comprehend the argument of his adviser, but an occasional point would gain lodgment with him and start his little mental machine into active operation. He had recollections of various times when it had been necessary for him to diligently avoid certain policemen and there was a forceful meaning in the young man's suggestion that some day the guilty must suffer.

"Do you think that some day I might be like that fellow if I tried?" asked Mickey, pointing to a man who was at that moment passing on the opposite side of the street.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Morgan. "He was once about as you are now. That is the editor of the *Courier*. Thirty years ago he used to sell papers for a living; now he gives employment to a hundred such as he once was."

"The other papers roast him strong, don't they?"

"Yes, they roast him because he is honest with himself. He is so independent that no party can depend upon him and his power is as great as his independence. His paper is the mouth piece of his convictions. That is an example of where fearless honesty wins."

"You say a fellow will never be rich if he ain't honest?"

"That's it, my boy; you'll never win out if you don't do the square thing, and while you are being honest with others be honest with yourself, too. Use every moment of your life to advantage. Learn to read, to write, to cipher, to think. Keep yourself clean so that the beautiful may think well of

you and not be afraid to shake hands with you and ask you how you are getting along. Did you see those two ladies a little while ago? I wonder what they'd think if they knew that fourteen years ago I was as poor and dirty as—as you are now."

Mickey flushed a little at that. The young man had made a cruel home thrust. "What can I do?" he asked and an earnestness shone in his eyes that brought a smile to the young man's face.

"Do right, my boy, and your chance will come," said Mr. Morgan, as he hastened away, and Mickey after another hour at his corner returned to his hive.

CHAPTER VII.

On this evening the boys did not climb dark stairs and go to sleep. The part of the programme omitted the day before was carried out. When Mickey got back to "The Joint" after his forenoon's labor he found Piggy very contentedly resting in the hive. Nick had given him a pie which had been devoured with the same omnivorous grace that had marked his dealings with the liver and onions the day before.

During the afternoon the cripple was stationed at an active street corner with a goodly supply of cheap pencils and early in the evening he hopped back to Mickey to show him a handful of small coins and all the pencils were gone.

About eight o'clock in the evening the boys started for the show. They entered a dingy theatre. The seats were crowded with men and boys. Loosely garmented females circulated about, jesting coarsely with those who would spare them a word. Above was a boxed and curtained gallery and from behind the curtains came sounds of boisterous laughter as bottles clinked and fluids gurgled into handled mugs.

Upon the stage, season-worn footlight slaves in harsh tones lined a slum street comedy and tossed stiffly feet whose nimbleness had departed years before. Piggy looked on in delighted wonder. Mickey fell asleep.

At the store Nick had for quite awhile been alone. He had turned down the lights at the fore part of the building and was sitting at a desk in the rear,

writing. An oil lamp threw a dim light across the pages before him and he worked on in silence. It was nearly eleven o'clock when a woman shuffled through the door and back toward him. She threw her weight upon the counter and turned her wildly wandering eyes upon the startled store keeper. "Why, hello Lil!" he said.

"Where's the kid?" She spoke thickly and swung unsteadily upon her feet. She had been drinking. "Where's the kid, I say?"

"Why, I don't know," said Nick, "he started away about eight o'clock, I don't know where he went."

The woman raised herself until she was almost erect. Her delicately shaped, though unclean hands, rested upon the counter and upon the fingers glistened a number of flashy stones. Her disheveled hair hung about her face over which traces of tears and dirt were alike conspicuous.

"Say, Nick, does he know me?"

"Why, I'm sure he knows you." The store keeper spoke in conciliating tones.

"Nick, do you know me? Do you know that I am a faithless runaway wife who has bathed in the filth of the gutter and eaten not a husk of sincere repentance until this very night? And this is the wrong, Nick! This is the great wrong: I took the pretty baby boy, the sweet little bundle of pink, the child of the man I really loved and I stopped not until in this great city the dazzling whirl of the under life caught me again, for I was without friends and without money and the baby and I must live. These rags!" She rubbed her hands over the sleeve of her dress once rich in quality and

colors. "These rags and these stones are the price of my soul."

She dropped her face over her arms upon the counter and shook in violent sobs. Nick remained silent, he could find no words to speak.

"Rags and rocks! rags and rocks!" moaned the poor woman, "—they are the price of my soul—and —the child shall be nameless forever! God forgive me, for I will never forgive myself!" She staggered to her feet and back into the shadows of a corner, for the thump of a crutch sounded upon the walk without and voices were heard drawing near to the entrance to the store.

"Aw, what's the use?" said Mickey, "stay here with me for a while. You can make money up here."

"But what'll de feller say what owns de shack?"

"I'll square it with him; he's a good fellow. You don't dare go back to the old man until he forgets about his bath, anyway."

The boys entered the store and passed Nick on their way to the hive. "Been to a show?" he asked.

"Yep," replied Mickey.

"How was it?"

"Piggy says it was good—I went to sleep and snoozed it out."

The boys went on into their little room. Nick locked the door that closed them in and Lil came from her hiding place. She was now somewhat sobered, though she walked rather unsteadily, the result as much of former dissipations as of those of the evening. Nick moved toward the entrance, hoping that she would follow him and depart, but before they were half way across the room she stopped and said: "I must say good-bye."

"He'll think it strange," suggested Nick.

"No," insisted Lil, "he'll not think it strange. I have been near him nearly all his life. He knows me as a friend. I want to say good-bye!"

"You are not going away, are you?"

"I want to see him again!" Lil commanded in a tone that indicated that she would brook no interference. A scene pended if her wish was not respected.

Nick stepped back and opened the door into the hive. "Mickey!" he called, "Lil is out here and she is going away. She says she'd like to say good-bye to you."

"All right, Nick," said Mickey, "I'll be out as soon as I get my pants on." Piggy mumbled a few words. "Shut your face, Pig, it's a lady friend come to bid me good-bye; you ain't in it, see?" In a few moments he came out of his room and walked carefully, for his feet were bare, down toward Nick and the visitor. His hair was tousled, his shirt unbuttoned, his pantaloons hanging by one suspender, and he himself the picture of a reluctant early riser. "Hello Lil," he said, as his eyes fell upon the street woman.

"Hello kid, had you gone asleep?"

"No, I was one station out yit; where you going?"

"South, for my health."

"Good-bye," said Mickey and he extended his hand.

"Good-bye!" said Lil as she grasped it and drew him closer to her, "I want to look into your eyes," she said, "you look so much like a brother—a little brother of mine. How old are you, Mickey?"

"Thirteen next September nineteen, so Buggy told me."

"Thirteen next September nineteenth. Yes! You're a small lad for your age. You haven't had a fair chance." She drew him still closer to her and then flung her arms about him and dragged him to her breast, "Oh, Bobby, my Bobby, I love you, Oh, I love you!" she cried, and she pressed kisses over his face while tears streamed from her eyes and her body trembled in unrestrained emotion. "I love you Bobby, I love you!" and then she thrust him away from her and rubbing a hand over her face exclaimed, "Why, why, Mickey, I forgot—I —I—I thought you were little Bobby—I thought you were Bobby, for a little while—good-bye!"

"Aw, that's all right," said Mickey, "good-bye— I'll see you when you come back," and he hurried back to the little bed he had prepared for himself on the floor; for Piggy slept on the cot.

Nick listened nervously to Lil while she told a disconnected story about herself and Mickey, but he felt that her condition precluded the probability of her giving him a correct idea of the real situation. Also, he was alarmed when in her wandering remarks she said, "I'm shadowed, Nick—they're on my trail all the time."

A sudden vision of big newspaper headlines in which Nick Delaney's "joint" was conspicuously displayed came up before him. He had a sincere thought for his own safety; a deep seated desire to avoid any unfavorable publicity, just at this time. The time was when Nick didn't care. Now he did care. He cared as if something vital to him depended upon his protecting himself. He cared so intensely that he forgot Mickey's interests. He

feared that Lil's imaginary shadows might close in on her right there, that very night in Nick Delaney's "joint."

He led her to the door. I'll see you again, Lil—in the day-time—when you're feeling better," he said gently.

Lil's mind grasped the situation in a feeble little flash of understanding, for she said: "I don't blame you, Nick! Tell him to be a good boy; but oh, what have I done, what have I done?" she moaned from the depths of her heart, as she pushed aside the thick black of the night. It closed in about her as she stumbled away.

"I hope nobody saw her in here," Nick muttered to himself as he turned the key in the door and climbed the stairs to his rooms.

For a long while he sat and pondered over the words of the woman: "What have I done, what have I done?" The agonizing cry of the remorse-stricken woman rang in his ears until from the depth of his own heart he cried: "What have I done, what have I done?" and the answer came not, save in the unechoing silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next day, at his post, Mickey thought frequently of the words of his advisor of the day before. He remembered the two beautiful ladies who had stood above him and talked with the young man who had once been as "poor and as dirty" as he, and he wondered how Mr. Arthur Morgan had done it.

"Do right and your chance will come." Those words were clear in his memory but the full knowledge of right was not with him, and was he to blame? A man handed him a quarter from which he was to take pay for a shine. Mickey slipped fifteen cents change into the extended hand of the awaiting customer. The man dropped it carelessly into his pocket and turned away.

"Do right, do right, do right, or your chance will never come," something cried to Mickey and he sprang after the man.

"I made a mistake," he said, "I owe you a nickel." The man took the small coin and with a "thank you" passed on.

Another customer, after a while, gave him a dime and turned away without awaiting for change. Under such circumstances, formerly, Mickey would have said nothing. On this occasion his inclinations were the same until the cry: "do right, do right," sounded again within him and he called to the man.

"Hey, mister, I only charge a nickel for a shine. Here's your change."

"You just keep that, kid, your shine is worth a

dime," was the reply and Mickey was happy at heart.

He brushed shoes thereafter even more carefully than before and many moved away more pleased with his work while a few said, as had the former customer, "keep the change, my boy." But when the day's work was done and he counted his earnings he discovered that he was short. He was not carrying home as many nickels and dimes as ordinarily and to him it seemed that that fact was a refutation of the assertions of Mr. Morgan.

Piggy, with pencils, at the same spot he had occupied the day before, did well, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon the boys drifted into Nick's and compared their earnings. Mickey was morally muddled. The intricacies of integrity bewildered and discouraged him. He saw no advantage in decreased income. How could a needy person be better with less, he wondered.

"Dey cums my way a whoopin' on dat cornder," said Piggy. "One feller gives me ten cents fer a pencil an' annuder trows me a nick an' says, 'keep de change!' "

"There's lots of them that way," explained Mickey and then they went to a little restaurant and had their one substantial meal of the day. It was a fine feast, consisting of tough sirloin steak, boiled potatoes with their clothes on, and two dishes of custard pudding.

"Dat stuff is a little de bes' I ever et," commented Piggy, smacking his lips over the custard.

"It's lilligant," Mickey admitted as he carried the last spoonful to his mouth, "but it don' come up to cranberry roll. We'll have cranberry roll tomorrow."

"But I mus' be gittin' back to de ol' man purty soon," insisted Piggy, "er he'll never let me in ergin."

"Aw, well, what's the diff? that don't cut no ice! You can get along without the old man—let him rustle for himself for a while. What does he do?"

"He let's me do it; yer see he's sick most of der time an' can't—"

"Can't do much but loaf around the saloon while you sell pencils. I'd let the old man root for himself, Piggy."

The boys left the restuarant and wandered back to Nick's. Mickey purchased a box of cigarettes and then suggested that they take a little stroll. "I want to see the bin where the fairy stays that was in 'The Joint' a couple a days ago," he explained to his companion. "You ought to seen her, Piggy; she was a little the swellest you ever see!" He handed Piggy a cigarette, lit one for himself, and continued as he puffed a little stream of smoke into the air: "You see I was squattin' on the corner of a cracker kit, getting outside of an apple pie, when in she comes. Nick and the other fellows was back at the end of the store doin' the 'quiet.' Well, this fairy she stops and gives me the 'long look' and it pretty near throws me into spasms 'cause I ain't used to no such 'size ups.' I thinks I'd better make a break to call Nick or she'll steal me, see? Well, I turns around quiet, keepin' an eye on her all the time, an' goes—" Mickey gave an imitation of the hissing whistle, "an' Nick he makes a rush to the front an' saves my life. While he was comin' up I thinks 'maybe she's hungry' an' I'm for slippin' her a piece of my pie, but she gives me the shake an' says 'no thanks, I'm loaded;' then I makes a

sneak 'cause I thinks she likes pie all right, but she don't want none with finger prints on it. Well, she staggers around there for a while buying some truck and saying, 'Oh how lovely!' an' all that, a lot of times, an' then she ducks an' the gang gives me the 'horse' 'cause she turned me down on the pie. Here, take a light, 'scuse me."

Piggy accepted the match from Mickey and lit his cigarette. He fingered it rather awkwardly and blew the smoke with less unconcerned freedom than Mickey.

"Who is she?" asked Piggy.

"I don't know," replied Mickey, "only she lives down here a couple of blocks, and I thought we'd take a turn down this way an' see the mansion what she bunks in."

Piggy bravely smoked upon his cigarette and then as bravely took it from his mouth and looked it squarely in the face. He hopped along beside Mickey, endeavoring to force an expression of extreme happiness into his face. More frequently he raised his cigarette and looked at it, and less frequently he carried it to his mouth. There were evidences of gastric disturbances within him and he but half listened to Mickey, when the latter said: "There's the place. Say, Piggy, how'd you like to linger in a bin like that, eh?"

"Firs' rate!" replied Piggy sadly, and so much so that his enthusiastic companion turned and looked at him with:

"What's the matter, Piggy, are you tired?"

"Naw, I'm all rite," the cripple proclaimed, and they moved on.

"Oh-o-ooh, whooup!"

The noise came from Piggy, and with it came

the greater part of his late dinner. Mickey grabbed him by the arms and steadied him.

"Oh-o-ooh, whooup!—" continued Piggy, "I'm dyin'!" he spluttered, and the genuine tears coursed down his cheeks. "Oh-o-ooh, whooup!" Mickey half carried the cripple up the broad walk and to the porch of the very house they had just been admiring.

Piggy groaned hopelessly and Mickey was in the throes of bewilderment. "What's the matter, Piggy?" he asked, again and again.

"I'm dyin'," the cripple responded.

A door opened and a lady stepped out upon the porch followed by a little girl. Mickey, glancing up, saw that the little one was the girl whom he had met at the store. The lady knelt by the side of Piggy and laid her hand on his brow, over which great drops of perspiration were spread.

"Run and get me some cool water, Nina," she said, and the little girl hastened away and soon returned with a pitcher of water and a towel. Mickey was alarmed when he looked upon the face of the cripple after it had been washed a little. Surely Piggy was very sick!

The little girl stood by looking on with pity shining in her eyes. Mickey looked at her and then at his hands, remembering the embarrassment they had caused him when he had met her before. He was happy to notice that they were much more nearly white than they had been on the former occasion. He looked at them proudly. True, there were some dark streaks across them, but that could not be helped. That was a characteristic of boys' hands, but girls' hands, why, of course, they might be different—he didn't know. Then around the

tips of his finger nails there were half circles of black; they were rather pretty, Mickey thought. He looked at them and thought of beautiful pictures he had seen mounted in black. Piggy opened his eyes.

"Are you better, little boy?" the lady asked.

"Yep, I tink I am."

"Poor fellow," she said, rubbing the damp towel over his forehead. "What made him sick?" she asked, turning to Mickey.

Piggy raised one of his hands to his face, but as his fingers approached his nose he suddenly jerked them away and gagged.

"I don't know, mam;" Mickey replied, "we just had dinner a little while ago, and then come out for a little walk an' Piggy gets groggy."

"Do you mean that he has been drinking?"

"Oh, no, mam; he just gets sick."

Piggy was recovering rapidly, and in a few moments raised himself, and, in response to the lady's inquiry as to the cause of his troubles, informed her that it was the cigarette that did it.

"Did you try to smoke a nasty cigarette?" she asked.

"Mickey he kin smoke 'em an' blow smoke in wheels an' out tru his nose an' do dots er tings, but dey makes me sick—I ain't as much of er man as Mick is," he explained sadly.

"You will be much more of a man if you never smoke," said the lady, and Mickey felt himself in instant disgrace. He dared not look at either the lady or the little girl, and he listened to the further words with flaming cheeks.

"You shouldn't use tobacco in any form, little boy; it makes your whole system impure, impairs

your intellect, and renders you unfit to associate with clean and beautiful people. Boys and young men sometimes become so addicted to the cigarette habit that they are driven insane through the use of them and have to be put in great iron cages and kept there just the same as wild animals. Cigarettes are made out of the stubs of dirty old cigars that are picked from floors and alleys and spittoons, and worked over. I don't wonder that they make you sick."

"But dey don' make Mickey sick," said Piggy, and the woman turned to our friend in disgrace.

"Do you like to smoke cigarettes?" she asked.

"Yes, mam," he replied.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you know no better and are much more excusable than many others: but I tell you, my boy, you are doing yourself a great injury when you smoke, and you will some day suffer for it. You are disgracing God's image by saturating it with nicotine and he will not hold him guiltless who taught you to do these wrong things. The race suffers today because of this wide-spread habit. Diseases heretofore unknown are traced to it. Innocent little children are born into the world weak and unhealthy in body and brain simply because their fathers are slaves to tobacco.

Mickey did not reply. He looked steadily at a hack driver who was seated on the top of his vehicle puffing delightedly at a cigar. There was an expression of unalloyed happiness on the man's face and the curling smoke that rolled away seemed to scroll the word "delight" in the welcoming air. A little dog bounded up into the hack by the side of the driver who puffed a stream of smoke into its

nostrils. The dog jumped back to the ground sneezing furiously and shook its head ominously at its tormentor.

"Will you please try to quit smoking, Mickey? That's your name is it?"

"Yes, mam; my name is Mickey Peck. My grandpap was ninety years old when he died an' he smoked all his life, ever since he was twelve years old, an' he made a pair of shoes the week before he 'checked in.' He weighed two hundred pounds and could walk to the brewery and back, which was four miles, until two weeks before his 'works was stopped.' He was never sick but twice in his life an' the first time he was cured by putting a tobacco poultice on his breast an' the last time he died 'cause he was so old."

Mickey felt that he had offered a strong defence but he did not turn his eyes to those of the woman or the little girl. He looked out and beyond to where a great, huge column of bricks reared itself high in the air, a prominently silent defender of the principles he was defending—it was smoking furiously.

Really, Mickey was almost ready to cry, for he felt that he was in the presence of those not in sympathy with him.

"Does your father smoke?" asked the lady.

"My father died when I was a baby," answered Mickey; and then he thought of the woman's argument—"My father and mother both had the fever and died," he continued, in explanation.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said the lady, and then Mickey looked at her and at the little girl, too, and they were both so deeply sympathetic that he could read it in their eyes. A great lump came up into

his throat and a few tears rolled down over his cheeks. Those were the first tears he had ever shed in memory of his parents and his misery was such happy misery!

He turned away and looked again at the hack driver who was lighting a fresh cigar, and on to the smoke stack that still continued its puffing. "Oh, the barrenness, the loneliness of friendless life!" thought Mickey—or thoughts to that effect. "How could he endure to go away from these beautiful people who felt sorry for him, back into the desolate unsympathetic circles from which he had but lately wandered." He turned and glanced through a window into the home. A great mirror threw back his own reflection to him; beautifully upholstered chairs were ranged around the room; fine pictures were hung upon the walls and a handsome piano was stationed in a corner. He had never been in a place so beautiful and he wondered why it was so. He wondered if it were his fault, or if it were the fault of his father and mother, or of his grandfather, who had smoked "all his life 'since he was twelve years old.'"

"Come, Piggy," he said, "we'll move back to Nick's an' you can go to bed."

At that moment a landau drew up before the residence. A gentleman stepped out. "Oh, there's papa!" exclaimed the little girl, and she rushed to meet the man who walked slowly up toward the house and between his lips he held a cigar around which was a little paper band.

"That's a good brand," said Mickey, glancing slyly at the lady—"that brand with the red paper around it—that's a genuine Key West—it ain't no 'floor finda.'" She returned his look half sorrow-

fully and Mickey felt a pang of repentance for his words. "I hope," he added, seriously enough. "that your children won't get as hard up as Piggy is, 'cause the boss smokes'." Mickey was helping Piggy down along the walk.

"He smoked a cigarette and got sick," explained the little girl to her father as they approached the two boys.

The father laughed and turned and called to the driver of his carriage: "Jim, load these kids in and take them home!" and he and the little girl passed on and up into the house.

Mickey and Piggy climbed into the richly furnished vehicle and sank into the soft cushions. The driver cracked his whip and the span of blacks moved swiftly away.

"Where to?" asked the driver.

"608 North Eighth Street," replied Mickey, and that was fourteen blocks away. "Say, what you think of this, Piggy?"

"It pays ter git sick, don' it?"

"That's what!" replied Mickey. "If you hadn't got groggy I wouldn' got to see the fairy again nor we wouldn' had the lecture on cigarette smokin' and we wouldn' got this spin in the 'easy rider,' eh?"

"I'm glad I sucked de 'cig,' but I tink I'll 'ave ter shy on 'em nex' time, 'cause dey makes me stummick growl," explained the cripple.

The boys leaned back on the cushions in elegant ease as they swept down the street.

"Here you are, kids," the driver said suddenly, and it was so soon! Why it seemed to them that they had been in the carriage but a few seconds.

"Say, mister," said Mickey, "are you going back?"

"Yes," the fellow replied, "I'm going back as far as the central barns."

"Well," continued Mickey, "we'll go with you. The crip here was going to stop at his club for an hour or two but changed his mind. Dump us off as near to Nick Delaney's joint as you can."

"You live around there somewhere?" the driver asked suspiciously.

"Yes; we live in the annex," replied Mickey; "first floor." The driver smiled half angrily as he swung his team around and started back on a swift trot.

Mickey lit another cigarette, threw one leg over the other, crossed his hands over his bulging little stomach, tipped his head into a saucy position and puffed, puffed, puffed. His conceits were outpacing his achievements. In a short while the carriage drew up before "The Joint," and Nick watched the boys roll out, for the driver hurried them with a "Fall out here now, pretty quick."

"Seems to me you're getting a little strong," commented Nick, as the two boys entered the store. Piggy went on back to the hive.

"Say, we fell in!" explained Mickey. "You ought to been 'wid us' Nick! We shoots out for a little stroll an' the crip goes wrong on a 'cig' and I steers him up to the swell house where the fairy with the blue socks lives. The lady and the little girl comes out an' they swobs Piggy with a wet rag till he comes to, an' then he tells 'em that the 'cig' throws him off, an' the dame she gives me the bum steer dope about smokin', and she tells us that we'd be 'patter' if we never touched the weed, an' I comes

back with the tale about my grandad who smoked all his life an' fell off of old age, an' then she asks me about my father and mother and I tells her they're dead an' she goes soft an' the little girl goes soft an' I goes soft, an' we spends a few minutes drainin' our eyes. Then the guy that owns the place drives up an' he tells us to crawl in the carriage and spin home an' we takes the tip and here we is."

"You had a nice ride," Nick commented.

"I guess, yes!" Mickey replied; "we trots the blacks about forty blocks an' the stiff on the top seat didn' like it much neither."

"He'll recover in the course of time. A few jaunts like that won't hurt his team any."

CHAPTER IX.

"Got drunk as a fool and it didn't cost me a cent!" The speaker was a tall slender boy about twenty years of age and he laughed gayly as he spoke to a group of lads who were with him leaning against a polished bar in a room well filled with tables about which were men seated and standing looking down upon cards and rattling checks and coins with the freedom of millionaires. Occasionally a person would turn away and leave the room. Of the vanishers, the faces of some expressed despair while others assumed a stolid indifference and a few smiled satisfactorily as if they had been well treated where others had fared otherwise. It was seven o'clock or a little later in the evening of the day that Mickey and Piggy had taken their ride.

"Yes! Got drunk as a fool and it didn't cost me a cent," echoed the young man and the others pressed nearer to him and joined him in his hilarity.

"You see, it was this way," he explained, "I was sittin' in the bar room of the Union when the guy comes in an' he squints at me an' then he says, 'have a drink?' and I says, 'I don't care if I do,' for I was mighty dry and had just been lingerin' around waitin' for some such golden opportunity. Well, we drinks and then I says, 'have one on me.' I see he was easy and flush and I gives the bar keep the wink, 'cause I didn't have a red sou. Well, we drinks again and the fellow won't let me pay, and I calls for more an' he won't let me pay again, and we both got so full that they had to spread us out in a wine room."

And it didn't cost a cent! How fortunate that seemed to the young man and to his associates, too, for they all looked at him enviously. The tall young man moved across the room and stood looking at a faro deal.

"How they turning, Kid?" asked the onlooker.

"This is my off day," replied the dealer. "They're doin' me in forty different languages."

The deal went on: the hand of the dealer moved out and back gathering in and passing out chips and dollars. Men came and went. Sullen oaths rumbled from dry throats and forced laughter made an offensive discord in the medley of noises.

A Chinaman, with eyes riveted upon a dollar chip resting on the deuce, jabbered furiously when the deuce lost and the heartless dealer dropped the chip into the drawer. "Come again, John," was the encouraging advice the celestial received.

"Me bloke," explained he, rising reluctantly and passing from the room.

"He'll be back with another dollar, in a few moments," said the dealer; and it was so, for in a very short time John glided in again and placed another dollar on the deuce, coppered.

"Oh, ho! Try it the other way this time, Johnnie; well, watch for a two spot."

A few turns and the deuce came up winner.

"Damme such a glame!" John exclaimed. "Me play tloo splot to win, tloo splot no win. Me play tloo splot to no win, tloo splot win—damme sluch a glame, me no playee flaro some more!" and he was again gone and the others laughed at his anger.

At the bar, glasses rattled and half drunken reprobates lolled over the smooth railing. Thick tongued men jested coarsely with the jolly bar

keeper who flung beer mugs back and forth with the dexterity of a juggler. A side door opened and two boys surreptitiously slid into the room. One was Mickey.

At sight of the boys a half dozen young men pushed toward them. "Hello, Mickey!" said the tall, slender boy. "How you fixed?"

He and Mickey stepped aside and the boot-black drew from his pocket a handful of coins.

"Kid is losing today and I think we can win out something," the fellow continued. Mickey turned his money over to his companion and the young fellow approached the faro table. For a full hour he sat, now winning, now losing, until, finally, all was lost. Then he arose and said to Mickey: "Well, cul, we're off! I thought we'd get him to-night, but we didn't; come in tomorrow eve and I'll see what I can do.

Mickey was a little crest-fallen. His money was all gone and he had nothing to show for it; not even a full stomach, a box of cigarettes, or a stogy. He turned away half angrily. "Say," called the young man, "you forget about that night three weeks ago, eh?"

Yes, Mickey had almost forgotten about that. One night three weeks ago he had come into the gambling hall with only fifty cents and he and this same young man had stepped out about ten o'clock with ten dollars each, all won off of fifty cents and, oh, hadn't they had a time! Didn't they stay up and 'decorate' all night! All these facts this young man recalled to Mickey's remembrance and with a smile for the past Mickey turned to leave the room.

"You're a fish," whispered another into his ear,

just as he opened the door to leave. "That fellow can't win anything and he'll 'horse' you right along. Look, he's at the bar now!"

Mickey glanced back. The young man was at the bar. A glass was standing before him and the bar keeper handed him a large bottle of liquor. "You're a fish," echoed the voice. "Try me next time. I'll do you some good."

Mickey dodged through a narrow hallway into the full glare of a brilliantly lighted street. A young man dressed in the height of fashion and carrying in his neatly gloved hands a handsome walking stick, paused right before him. It was Arthur Morgan and he looked at Mickey sternly. "What have you been doing in there?" he asked.

"I 'staked' a fellow, but he 'horsed' me an' I'm broke," was the explanation given.

"Yes, and it will always be so," commented Mr. Morgan, "if you keep that up you'll always be broke and nobody will have much pity for you."

"One night three weeks ago," said Mickey, in vigorous defense, "I goes in there with a 'half' and we draws out twenty 'plunks' before midnight."

"What did you do with it?" asked Mr. Morgan.

"Aw," explained Mickey, "we goes out and has a time on part of it and then the next night we loses."

"Have you made a winning since?"

"Naw, but we been tryin'."

"Come in here and have something with me," said Mr. Morgan and he turned into a cafe and led the way to a little curtained corner in which was a small oak table and two chairs.

"Bring us some ice cream and cake," he said to

the girl that came to wait upon them. "Ah, what kind of cream do you like best, Mickey?"

"Any kind," was the response.

"Bring him some with nice crushed strawberries on the inside."

The waitress ordered the ice cream and then came and bent over Mickey and spread a pretty little napkin on the table before him. "Would you like a glass of water?" she asked pleasantly.

"Oh, don't go to no trouble for me," said Mickey.

"No trouble at all," she said with a smile, and pretty soon she brought in the ice cream.

Mickey's stood up, a great red and white pyramid on a delicate china base. A silver spoon rested on the edge of the plate upon which sat the saucer of cream. The girl placed a glass of water at his right and the glass was so thin that Mickey feared almost to touch it. The water was sparkling with cold. Soon she brought a plate of cake and it was white as driven snow and spongy and sweet. Then she withdrew and Mr. Morgan and Mickey were alone in one of the prettiest places Mickey had ever seen, and the delicacies he was eating were delightful to his palate. It seemed to him that he was in a dream; that the simple beauties about him were unreal; that the smoothly shaven, elegantly dressed young man across the table was a creature of his imagination alone and he wondered if he would not start to roll down stairs pretty soon and be awakened.

"How much money did you have when you went into the hall?" asked Mr. Morgan.

"About a dollar 'n a half," replied Mickey.

That would have bought you fifteen dishes of ice cream, or a pair of new shoes, or a clean shirt,

or new pantaloons. If you were to save a dollar every day for a year, at the end of that time you could start yourself into a little business, or you could pay your board and go to school for a year, or you could learn a trade, or learn to sing, or to play on musical instruments, or to paint or draw—"

Mickey started—"Could a fellow learn to draw pretty pictures—a fellow like me?"

"Why, of course," replied Mr. Morgan, "but you would have to save your money, and work, too. Yes, you'd have to work. Sometimes it's pretty hard for boys to settle down and work steadily at anything of that kind, but they that do win out in the end and nobody can steal their winnings, for they are in the mind and on the brain." Mickey was silent. "The boys that spend their money as they get it, gamble it away, smoke it up, or drink it into their stomachs, will never develop into anything. They are destined to a life of drudgery or infamy. It is easy to live well, to dress well, to feel well and to have good companions, if you will do right; but if one frequents such places as you came from this evening and spends his money at gambling and drinking, he can expect little happiness and plenty of misery. Now I must be going, Mickey—I have a date with that young lady you saw the other day—you remember her? You sit right here and finish your cream and cake and think about what I have been telling you. Good-bye, I'll see you again."

Mr. Morgan arose and passed out. The curtain closed behind him and Mickey was alone in the cozy little corner. How much more beautiful it was, he thought, than that dirty, smoky gambling hall. The curtain rustled a little. A small hand

brushed it open and the girl came in with a glass of some red liquid which she placed before Mickey.

"I hain't got no money," said he.

"Ah, that is all right," she said. "I want to treat you well so you will come again. We want all of Mr. Morgan's friends to be our customers."

Mickey sipped the pretty beverage. How delightful to the taste it was! He was sorry when it was all gone and everything was gone and he must go. He stepped away from the table and lifted his hat from the hook. What a 'bummy' looking hat it was? He ought to be able to wear a better hat. He put it on his head and stepped out. The pretty waitress smiled to him. He jerked his hat from his head, remembering that Mr. Morgan had done that when the two ladies smiled to him on the street. He wiggled awkwardly to the door. "Much obliged for the juice," he said.

"You are very welcome," she replied. "Come again."

"Say, Nick," said Mickey as he rushed into "The Joint" a few moments later, "you ought to been wid me this eve. Say, you know this fellow Morgan what writes for the papers?"

"Yes, I know of him—he has the goods on him, too."

"Well, he's a friend of mine, an' I meets him this eve an' he gives me the roast about gamblin'."

"Good boy—he's on—you want to open your ears to him!"

"Yes, he gives me the roast about gambling an' runs me into a little joint that was fixed up prettier than a bird cage and he does the blow for crush' strawberry ice cream an' angel's ginger bread an' water in a spoon holder an' he keeps givin' me the

talk till I about thinks he's right, then he takes a sneak an' tells me to tarry till I'm done 'cause he's going to see a fairy. Well, I'm settin' there all alone when in comes the butterfly waiter girl with a glass of rosy red juice an' she says, 'it's all yours' an' she ducks. Well, I drinks it down an' sails out an' she says, 'come again, we wants all of Morgan's friends to drop their dough here', an' I says this is the place where I gamble in the future, only I don't say it out loud—what you think?"

"It's an all right scheme, buddy. I've been through it all and if I had what I've gambled away, I'd be traveling in Europe for my health today." And at remembrance of his health Nick broke into a fit of furious coughing.

CHAPTER X.

"Do right and your chance will come," Mr. Morgan had said, and the words were reiterated in Mickey's mind. But the proof was demanded instantly. If he did right he expected the immediate reward. At the close of a day, having robbed no man, he expected that by some miraculous manipulation of things his receipts would be greater than they would have been had he continued his former practice of taking all he could get; and when such was not the case his logic told him that it was not profitable to do right and he was almost uneasy at conscience because he had neglected opportunities to swindle customers. Yet, having once done right, it became easier next time and with it came the subtle realization that things are not always as they seem and that the material representation of right, be it ever so small, is the most enduring of all substances.

It was about the middle of the afternoon following the events of our last chapter that Mickey drifted into Nick's, having had a day of unusual quiet on his corner. Business had not been good though soil-worn shoes were as numerous as ever. The boot-black had neglected a chance to confiscate twenty cents of the money of another, and as a result when he walked slowly into "The Joint" he had a 'wishy-washy' feeling. Somewhere he had heard, 'the good die young,' and he did not think it strange. He thought it must be awful to be good; the very thing itself must be a death strain.

"You remember the other night, Mickey, Lil called to say good-bye," said Nick.

"Yes, she was a little jagged, eh?"

"She's dead."

"Dead?" Mickey looked at Nick in perplexed wonder. "Dead?" he repeated the word as if he thought Nick had misused it, "You don't mean Lil is dead, do you, Nick?"

"Yes, she died that night."

"Why, she didn't look sick, Nick, only a little groggy, I thought."

"She poisoned herself."

Mickey listened in wonder and through his mind ran, "The good die young." But was Lil good? No, Lil would not be called a good woman. And she killed herself! Well, she must have been tired of living, and could one be bad and be miserable and be so anxious to die that he would kill himself? Ah, surely not! Lil could not be dead! Why, he had seen her and been in her strong arms but a few days ago, and but a week or so ago she had stopped him on the street, laughed and talked with him, and had given him a half dollar. "Are you sure about that, Nick?"

"Yes, for I was up to the undertaker's and saw her body. She is dead."

Mickey leaned against the counter and looked at the floor—"She is dead!" He had known of another street woman who had poisoned herself some weeks before and then he had stopped one morning where a crowd was gathered around a prostrate form on Amy street, and learned that a man had shot himself and was dying. As the officers carried the body to the black vehicle that had been called, Mickey caught a glimpse of the white face and the

bloody spot on the forehead. It was Chic Liggitt, a book maker. Mickey had seen him often in the pool rooms and admired his strong voice and genial manner; but, of course, he was not a good man.

"She wrote me a little letter," said Nick, "and see here, Mickey." Mickey walked over to where Nick was unfolding a sheet of note paper, and looked at the scrawled message. "She says: 'Give Mickey the little watch I send herewith, and tell him to be a good boy!

'Good-bye,

'LIL.'"

"She's been pretty good to me," commented Mickey unsteadily, and then he picked up the beautiful little watch that lay on the counter and opened the case. There had been some words engraved on the inside but they had been disfigured until they were apparently illegible.

"You can read nothing there," said Nick.

"You must take good care of that watch, Mickey; it may have been sacred to her."

Mickey carried it with him back to the hive and placed it, for the time being, in his strong box. Then he unfolded a sheet of brown paper and holding it at arm's length examined the drawing thereon.

"That's too fine a looking horse for a dray puller," he commented to himself, "I guess I'll have to use him for a hack—he's too well fed for a common nag."

Nick had not read all of Lil's letter to Mickey. In it she had thanked Nick for his kindness to the boy and begged him to continue it. Also, she had assayed to tell something more about Mickey, but it was evident that her sentiments had fought over the advisable policy, in view of certain features of

the situation about which she alone knew. It seemed as if she would and she would not tell something more, but in the end she did not and her life was snuffed out, leaving Mickey as much of a mystery to Nick as ever, and Nick admitted to himself that perhaps it was better so; no doubt Lil knew what she was about. He did not dream that even to the very end Lil carried in her heart a bitter hatred of an absolutely innocent woman and refused at the threshold of eternity to make a concession in favor of that woman's feelings.

After a while Piggy came in from the streets, and though the day's work had not been as good as common at the stand he had been occupying, it was so much better than he had been accustomed to in the lower quarters that he was in good spirits. He and Mickey started to their dining place.

"You remember when the lady came to see me the other night, after we was in bed," said Mickey.

"Yep, the one what come to say farewell."

"Well, she goes and poisons herself."

"What was de rush?"

"Don' know—she writes a letter to Nick, sends me a little watch for a present, takes the 'quit dose' and goes. She was pretty good to me, too."

"They does that right along—women."

"Men, too."

"Wunner why?"

"Aw, they gits worn out—tired of livin' an' wants to rest, so they goes."

"Say, Mickey, do you think that woman what swobbed me face wid de rag 'll ever do dat?"

"No, she'll stay it out an' when she quits there'll be purty people standin' around with white rags in their hands bleedin' at the eyes, and they'll put her

in a box with gold handles on it and cloth all nailed over it and flowers piled around—I saw one onct."

"Where to?"

"In the big 'pile' at the corner of Green and Tenth. The people was going in one crack and comin' out another, so I gits in the drift and takes a squint at the corpse. They give me the 'cold eye', some of the push, but I sticks it out and seen the whole works. I tell you it pays to be a corpse like that! They could have raked off more than twenty dollars in no time if they'd a charged a quarter for winkin' at the stiff, but it didn't cost a cent."

"Dere's a big diffrence in stiffs."

"Yes; now that one I looked at wasn't as purty as Lil an' there was ten to one to look at her after she was dead. It ain't the purty corpses that draws the crowds."

"Ner de good ones neider?"

"Naw, I thinks it's the price that does the work. If a stiff lives in a big 'pile' an' has the price, folks come to look at him when he's dead. They turn out at his funeral—give him a good send off; but if he was a 'hop-scotch' boy or a woman like Lil they don't bother about calling on them after they're dead—what's the use?"

Discussing the gruesome topic the boys turned into a restaurant and ordered their simple rations, over which they continued the talk much to the amusement of several unpretending listeners. Mickey joked with the waiter girl, took a few bites of cranberry roll and then told Piggy about the rotten carcass of a man that was dragged from under a street walk several months before.

"You ought to seen it, Piggy," he said, "it was chawed up by rats an' the ears was gone, an' so was

the nose, an' the eyes was bugged away out just as if it was trying to look surprised. It didn't smell like no drug store perfumery neither, for it had been in there for a long time an' the fellers that took it out held their noses in their mits and tried to keep from 'unloadin'. I stood away out of reach, 'cause I ain't stuck on smellin' no dead men—How you like cranberry roll?"

"Out er sight—it's a winner!"

"But it ain't as good as apricot puddin'. Say, we'll have apricot puddin' some of these days when we're flush."

The boys left the restaurant and wandered about the streets for a while. It was within about four blocks of "The Joint" that the tragedy of the day occurred.

The boys met the colored boot-black, Sam, and Mickey paused to speak to him. Piggy pressed on to cross the street. There was a little jam, a confusion, a cry or two from excited persons and Mickey turned and looked toward Piggy. A great wagon loaded with beer kegs was bearing down upon him; another vehicle was beyond, another behind. The driver of the beer wagon was asleep, or drunk. His team lunged furiously and Mickey saw the foot of a horse land upon Piggy's shoulder. He sprang to help his friend. A hand jerked him back, but he saw the great wheels grind over and crush the poor cripple. Not a cry escaped Piggy. His exit was painless, though as it was made his face reflected a pitiful longing. His eyes were burning into Mickey's as if he would speak to him as he went.

In a few seconds it was over. Mickey bounded to Piggy and cried into the unhearing ears. The

crowd began to gather. "He's dead, my boy," said the man who had jerked Mickey from the fate of his friend.

Mickey turned and looked about him. His eyes fell upon the driver of the beer wagon, who sat upon his high seat stupidly looking back upon the crowd. A furious fire gleamed in Mickey's eyes. He rushed through the crowd and looked about. He found a stone, a good sized stone. He gathered it in his hand and leaped nearer to the dazed driver and with well directed aim hurled it. The missile landed on the side of the driver's head and he rolled over and down into the arms of an officer, while the blood spurted from a huge gash in his scalp.

Through the remainder of the afternoon Mickey passed hardly conscious of what happened. The memory of Piggy's last burning glance stayed with him and held him captive. He wished that he had killed Piggy's murderer, and his one pleasure in connection with the sad happening was the remembrance of seeing the blood spurt from a stone cut and a heavy form roll from a high seat. He was taken in a patrol wagon and brought before a man who asked him many questions concerning Piggy, all of which he answered intelligently, and then he was taken before another man who took him by the hand and asked him if he had intended to kill the driver of the beer wagon, and Mickey informed him that he had and that he hoped the man would never get well.

"But that will not bring your little brother back to life—or was he your brother?" said the man.

"No, he was no kin to me at all," explained Mickey, "only a chum."

"Well, the law will take charge of the driver of

the beer wagon now, and you must not do anything more about it. If you had killed him we would have to hold you, but he will get well and you may go, only I must have your address. We may have to call you in later."

Mickey gave them his address and departed. He related the whole sad occurrence to Nick as he puffed at a cigarette, and the proprietor of "The Joint" gave him earnest sympathy.

"Say, Nick," he asked in conclusion, "did you ever know of an ice cream wagon running over anybody?"

"No, I don't believe I did," acknowledged Nick.

"It's always a stinkin' old beer wagon," exclaimed Mickey, "with a drunk guy on the perch pullin' at the strings! I'm goin' to quit the whole push! It'll be kind of dark in here tonight," he said, as he started toward his hive.

"You go up with me tonight," Nick insisted; "there's lots of room up stairs, only I may bother you a little with my coughing."

Mickey was glad to accept the invitation. He was not to be troubled by a little neighborly coughing. He liked to stay in Nick's rooms. There were two of them, one, a sleeping room, while the other facing the street was furnished cosily and used as a sitting room. A woman from the third floor took care of them and she always had them clean and nice. Mickey stepped back into the hive and soon returned with a sheet of brown paper in his hand.

"Nick," he asked, "does that look like a hack horse?"

Nick held the paper before him and eyed it critically. "Why, no, Mickey, that don't look like

a hack horse, that looks more like a racer—why, that looks a whole lot like Whitefield, that won the two ten pace."

"Aw, that's the trouble," said Mickey, "I was lookin' at him last Sunday in the Central barns an' that's the reason I can't draw a dray horse!"

"Go take a good squint at a dray horse, then you'll be all right," suggested Nick, as he prepared to close for the night.

CHAPTER XI.

The next morning Mickey was very lonely. Piggy's absence was most noticeable. Though he had been but a short time with Mickey that short time had been long enough to establish a sympathetic current. Nick slept rather late and his bed fellow was up and down long before he arose.

"You're too soon for me," he said, as he came down stairs and found Mickey waiting. "Did I keep you awake with my barking?"

"No, I didn't hear you bark much, but I was seein' Piggy all the night lookin' at me just like he looked when the wheels went over him, and that kept me from sleepin' much."

"That'll pass off in a night or two," explained Nick; "I know what it is like; I used to farm when I was a boy—father was a farmer, and I remember one day we were butchering and father wanted me to help. I went out to watch them kill the pig and when they hit it on the head with a sledge it looked so pitifully out of its eyes that I felt sorry for it, and the more I thought about it the more sorry I became until I went into the house and cried like a baby. A whole lot of nights after I would wake up and see that pig. What do you think of those for berries?"

"They are fine; are they very high, Nick?"

"Twenty cents a box—a box will feed four nicely. If we had some nice cream, such as we used to have on the farm, we'd just fix up a mess of these for ourselves, but strawberries ain't no good without rich cream to pour over them."

"They're mighty nice jammed up in ice cream."

Mickey helped Nick open out his display goods and then purchased a pie and devoured it with the usual relish, after which he lit a cigarette and sat puffing at it, forgetful of everything else save Piggy.

"I just ran over to get them for breakfast. Papa is very fond of berries for breakfast."

Mickey but dimly heard the word; he was thinking of the way he and Piggy got away from the cripple's 'grandad'.

"They are quite an appetizer," said Nick.

"Yes, sir, I could just live on them if mamma would let me."

Mickey glanced up. The little girl with 'blue socks' was standing looking right at him, and he had a cigarette in his mouth. He dropped it behind a box and turned and looked away.

"I wonder if that isn't the little boy that was at our house the other day!" the little girl said to Nick. He was with a cripple boy who was sick."

"Yes, he's the same kid—Mickey come here." The boy arose and went slowly forward. "Mr. Peck this is Miss—Miss—ah—I've forgotten your name," said Nick to the little girl.

"Nina Edith Carmen," said she.

"Yes—Mr. Peck, Miss Carmen."

Mickey shuffled nervously, with his 'bummy' hat in his hands.

"Where is the other little boy?" asked Nina.

"He's dead."

"Oh, was he so sick?"

"No," explained Mickey, "it wasn't the 'cig'—it was the beer wagon—he was run over by a beer wagon."

"Oh!" said the little girl and the word was spoken in tones expressing deep sympathy and sorrow, "Oh—that is too bad! How did it happen?"

"It was this way," said Mickey, who was put more at ease by the little girl's frank, friendly, condolence. "Piggy an' me, we goes to dine at the Gem cafe and we fills ourselves an' then we starts for a little stroll. Well, I meets a friend and stops to chin him a little while, an' Piggy he drives on into the street and a big beer wagon with a drunk mug on the summit runs him down and he don't say a word but just shuffles."

"He was a good boy, wasn't he?" asked Nina.

"Yes, he was pretty good for the chance he had——"

"I must hurry home or mamma will be after me. I am so glad he was a good boy." She hurried away with her berries and Mickey said to Nick:

"Say, Nick, that was a warm one!"

"What?" asked Nick, laughing.

"That knock down—you made me dizzy all over."

"Why! Didn't you want to meet the young lady?"

"I don't think I did—you know her an' her mother gives me the roast for 'cig' smokin'."

"They served you right. Cig smoking is a bad habit. I had to quit it or quit the earth, so I gave up the 'cigs,' though it would have been easier to quit the earth."

"Do you think it gets all through a fellow's blood? The woman gives me the song about its soakin' into a fellow."

"Yes, of course it does, and it takes seven years to get it out. Let me see, you're about thirteen

now! Well, if you were to quit now, when you get to be twenty the cig juice will be all out of you and you'd be new all over."

Mickey sat in sober meditation for several minutes.

"I wonder where the boys are this morning," said Nick, after a while, "they're slow."

In a few minutes Burt Craige came in. He walked rapidly and fingered his mustache unceasingly.

"Pink's nipped," he said to Nick.

"What!"

"Yes, they pinched him last night and he's sure for a term of ten. He took too many chances. I tell you the smoothest of them have to play the safety role."

"Do you mean that Pink is goin' up?" asked Mickey.

"Yes, buddy, he touched one too many. The law has got him in its talons and his fate is swift and certain. He goes into Burke's court and the old judge is merciless. I saw the boy early this morning and he was pale as a ghost. He's weak now that he knows he has to go. They're coming down a little heavy along the line, Nick—see?"

"Thanks!" replied Nick, and he moved to the rear of the store, opened a drawer and began to gather the contents into a single bundle. He was interrupted, however, by Burt, who called him aside and said:

"Say, Nick, this little flurry, you know—the extraordinary precautions of the sleuth hounds has caught me short; can you spare me a half for a few days? I'll be all right as soon as things quiet down." Nick gave him the half dollar, not with

the heartiest good will, and the young man passed out.

Mickey noticed that Nick was a trifle nervous and at every opportunity went back to look through the drawers. Kid dropped in for just a minute. "Nick," he said, "look for a slow down. They jerked the whole push last night. I'm quittin' the town—good-bye!" He shook hands and hurried away.

Nick wrapped a heavy paper about a mass of books, pictures, cards, etc. A low buggy with two male occupants stopped before the door of "The Joint." Nick with the bundle in his arms was walking forward. "Here, boy," he called to Mickey, just as one of the men entered the store; "take this package to the residence of the Rev. R. L. Spencer, corner of Eleventh and Jackson, and hurry back." He turned and faced Mickey and, as he handed him the bundle, he winked one eye heavily.

"Corner of Eleventh and Jackson!" repeated Mickey. "All right—get up them 'taters' for Casey's. I'll have to take them next."

"I just want to look around here a little," said the newcomer to Nick and at the same time he displayed credentials that entitled him to search "The Joint."

"All right," said Nick, indignantly, and turned to wait upon a customer.

Mickey started out rather slowly, but his speed increased as he got farther away, and he did not stop until he was on a high bridge midway across the deep river. He stood looking down upon the black stream, the bundle resting upon the railing of the bridge. He gave it a little push and it sank

toward the waters. "Oh!" he shouted, as he grabbed for the falling package.

"What was it, sonny?" asked a friendly gentleman who saw the apparent accident.

"A quarter's worth of bread," said Mickey.

"That's right, my boy, 'cast your bread upon the waters'," said the man as he passed on.

"That must be a joke," Mickey commented mentally. "He's one of them wise guys."

CHAPTER XII.

Mickey hurried back to "The Joint," got his boot-blacking outfit and was off for his corner, for the day was already advancing and the streets beginning to fill with people. Nick was busy and did not speak to the boy at that time, but the passing of the wink was all that was necessary to assure the uneasy store keeper that Mickey had done his part well.

The day passed slowly to our little friend, for there was a gloom hanging over him. He was restless and discontented, and sorry for his unfortunate friends. He thought almost tearfully of Pink. Pink had always been his friend and it was in Pink that Mickey had formerly seen the perfection of manhood. Pink, the fearless and nervy. Pink, the silver tongued confidence man; at one time the modest humanity-loving representative of a Y. M. C. A., to be in a few moments metamorphosed into a manager of a snide poker game. Many a time Mickey had listened in open mouthed wonder to the thrilling tales told by Pink of his adventures with the guileless, and the little boot-black had wished that some day he might be as successful a street operator as Pink was, but the last few days had had a slightly different effect upon Mickey. They had brought him in contact with those who were more admirable than Pink, for the lad could see that Pink's range was narrowed. It was not so with Arthur Morgan. He could stop and converse with the dirty little boot-black and then go into the presence of beautiful ladies who

wore soft, rustling garments, and be welcomed by them. Mr. Morgan's name was often in the big papers, not as one who was in constant danger of being sent to the penitentiary but rather as one who was respected and liked by a great community. Mickey had heard sporting men speak enviously of Mr. Morgan. Once he had heard Pink say: "If I had the genius Morgan has I'd turn my back on every sporting joint in the United States—that fellow has a pull with a handle to it." And then he remembered that he had heard the lady say to Mr. Morgan: "A little bit of genius and whole worlds of 'work'," and the word lingered with him, "work, work, work!" And in that same connection his memory came to his aid with a reminder that Pink had once said that he had spent weeks and months of hard work learning the most successful swindling schemes of the day. And now, after all his work, Pink was en route to the big stone building where a thousand convicts were lodged. He was to become one of a thousand nonentities; one of the world dead and world forgotten. For him the rising and the setting of the sun would be but the continuing record of wasted days. Ah, will God ever forgive a man for wasting moments! May he not in the uncertain beyond be made to account for each squandered second of his life!

"Hello, sonny!" Mickey looked up. He had been standing at the edge of the pavement, looking down into a drain course. It was Mr. Arthur Morgan.

"How do y' do, Mr. Morgan?"

"You're almost a landmark here, now," continued the gentleman; "give me a bright little shine. I'm off to an art exhibit."

"That's where they have pictures on the walls and all around, ain't it?" asked Mickey, as he proceeded with his work.

"Yes, and statuary, marble images you know, busts, etc.; lots of pretty things. I'm not much of a judge of such things, but I like to stand before them and look wise."

"Was you ever in jail?" asked Mickey.

"Why, no, my boy!" laughed Mr. Morgan, "why do you ask that?"

"Ain't you ever afraid of bein' arrested?"

"No, indeed. What makes you think I have been in jail?"

"Aw, I didn't know if you'd ever been in jail. I just wondered. Another friend of mine was pulled yesterday."

"And you expected all of your friends to follow suit, did you?"

"Naw, only I just wondered if you was 'leery' all the time, just the same as Pink used to be."

"Pink was your friend, eh? Well, he's good for from ten to twenty years. He'll probably never come out alive. That's a big price to pay for a few years' cheap living, isn't it, Mickey?"

"It's too much," replied Mickey.

"Yes, cheap living——" repeated Mr. Morgan, "poor living. That fellow never had half the happiness you and I have, Mickey. I should think such a life would worry a man to death. That's good enough for that shoe. Do you know you're an artist in your profession, Mickey?"

"Aw, it's just elbow grease that does it—that's all."

"Yes, that's right! It takes elbow grease to shine shoes, just the same as it takes elbow grease to do

anything else well. There comes my car. Give that a lick and let it go. Some day I'll take you out to see those pictures. Take good care of yourself and don't do anything to make yourself 'leery.' Keep the change. Hey there!" Mr. Morgan's car was rolling by, but the accommodating gripman slowed up while he swung on. He waved his hand to Mickey, who stood looking after him with a quarter grasped in his hand.

For a little while Mickey was kept busy, and then there was a lull in traffic and he again stationed himself by the side of the walk and stood looking down into the drain course, meditating soberly. From this lethargic state he was rudely resurrected by a tap on the shoulder and, glancing up, he met the gaze of Burt Craige.

"Ah, there, Mickey, business quiet?" asked Burt.

"Tough!" responded Mickey, "I hain't took in but forty cents this morning." Mickey was lying woefully. "This corner is gittin' no good. I've a notion to shift."

"The town is on the bum," continued Burt. "They're gettin' too pretty. A fellow can't do a thing without starting a breeze. You turn a trick with a shiver and a fellow takes chances if he puts his hands in his own pockets—a plain clothes man strolls up and claims the catch."

"Sometimes a fellow can't find anything in his pockets that's his own," continued Mickey.

"That's no joke, kidlet, and this is one of the times when I can't find anything in my pockets. An eagle eye would pluck a blank if he picked me up at this writing. Say, by the way, let me have a dollar a couple of days."

Burt's request came in the form of a demand,

and Mickey ran his hand down into his pocket and drew out a dollar and fifteen cents. "Thanks," said Burt, appropriating the entire amount.

"Leave me a few cents," pleaded Mickey.

"Why, kid, fifteen cents will get me a few bites to eat and the dollar will do for working money. I'll hand you a dollar and a half in a couple of days."

Mickey was dumbfounded by his own gullibility. He had suspected Burt's object in visiting him. Burt never returned borrowed money. Well, it was not so bad after all, for he had two or three dollars stowed away in the box in his hive—dollars that he had not gambled away as had been his former manner of dealing with surplus funds. Nevertheless, the thought of the probable loss of the money was distressing and served as an additional cause in making him despondent and sick at heart. His dollar and fifteen cents were gone, Lil was dead; Piggy was dead, Nick was in danger, and Pink was in jail. Oh what a loneliness bore down upon him as he plodded back to "The Joint."

"What did you do with it, Mickey?" asked Nick, when the boy entered the store.

"In the river," Mickey replied.

Nick started, "Did you throw them away?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes, I thought that was what you meant."

"Oh, well, it's all right—that's getting off pretty cheap. If they had found them in here it would have cost me ten times their value. I've a notion to shake the stuff; it's hard on the system handling it—a fellow feels nervous all the time."

"I see Mr. Morgan again today," said Mickey, "and he tells me that he was never arrested in his life."

"I should guess not!" laughed Nick. "What would he be arrested for?"

"And he says," continued Mickey, "that he—he is never afraid of being arrested—he can look a cop in the face and never blink. Burt Craige and Kid and Pink and—and——"

"And Nick Delaney," suggested Nick.

"Well, a whole lot of the fellows are always shying when they see a blue coat," continued Mickey.

"Yes," admitted Nick, "I knew one of the boys to jump out of a third story window when his wife came into his room with a new blue cloak on. As for me, I'm quitting the shady stuff. I've got a nice little straight graft here without any unsafe side lines."

CHAPTER XIII.

One evening, about a week later, Mickey came into the store and gave the key to the hive to Nick.

"Nick, I'm goin' to 'duck'," he said.

Nick was not surprised. He turned to his work with the simple advice:

"Take care of yourself, sonny, and drift back again some day."

"Say, Nick," asked Mickey, "would you care if I left my box out there till I get back?"

"That'll be all right; leave it right where it is; I'll see that it is well kept."

"And, say, Nick, would you mind keeping this little 'ticker' for me? I may lose it if I take it with me."

Nick turned and glanced at the little watch. It was the watch Lil had given to the boy. He had almost forgotten about Lil! She had told him to take good care of Mickey and to tell him to be a good boy.

"How long will you be gone," he asked, taking the slender little chain in his hand and holding the watch up before him. It swung back and forth like a clock pendulum.

"Aw, I don't know—I'm tired since everybody's gone. I'll be back some day."

"Oh, what a pretty watch!" Nina Carmen said, as she and a little friend bounded into the store. "Is it yours, Mr. Delaney?"

"No," replied Nick, "it belongs to Mr. Peck here."

Mr. Peck grew a little red in the face, but heard Nina exclaim:

"Isn't it beautiful, Clara?" And her little friend acknowledged that it was. "Wasn't it your mamma's?" asked Nina, turning to Mickey.

"No, mam," replied he, "it was given to me by a lady that was no kin to me."

The little girls looked over the watch with many admiring comments and then purchased a few edibles.

"You won't see me again for a long time, Mr. Delaney," said Nina, as she was about to leave the store.

"Are you going away?"

"Yes, sir, we are going away, for a while."

"I am sorry; I don't know what I'll do—all the young folks leaving me. Mickey is going to move, too."

Again Mickey became a little red in the face. He going to move! That was an odd way of expressing it and he felt that Nick knew it, too. Nick was such a tease. Mickey wasn't really going to move, he was going to 'duck'.

"Where are you going, Mr. Peck?" asked Nina.

"Aw, I'm just goin' away for a little trip."

"Just going to take a little summer's outing——" explained Nick, "——out all day and all night and all the next day and all the next night—you know!"

The little girls laughed a little, they did not know.

"Good-bye, Mr. Delaney!" Nina extended her hand to Nick. He shook it gently.

"Good-bye," said he, "I'm sorry to see you go."

"Good-bye, Mr. Peck," she reached her hand to Mickey, who took it half hesitatingly, for he had never shaken hands with a beautiful little girl before.

"My hands is dirty," he said, but her tiny white

fingers shrunk not the least from the touch of his soiled ones.

"You black boots and your hands have to be dirty," said Nina, and then with another good-bye to both, she and her friend were away.

"Cute little girls!" commented Nick. Mickey thought so, too, but he did not reply; he was thinking how unutterably lonely it would be now were he to remain.

"Yes, I'll keep the watch for you Mickey—Ah—be a good boy—good-bye."

The lad was already at the door. "Good-bye," he called back.

"Be a good boy!" Who ever heard the like coming from Nick. It seemed queer to Mickey and then he remembered the lines that had been read to him from Lil's letter, too; "Be a good boy—good-bye!"

"I should think," thought Mickey, as he pressed down the street toward the great Union railway station, "I should think Nick would get awful tired stayin' at the joint all the time, all by himself. It must be lonesome for him. I'll get back as soon as I get over this spooky spell and try and cheer him up.

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CHAPTER XIV.

When Mickey reached the railway station he pressed through the surging masses to the ticket window and purchased a ticket to Latchville, a suburb of the city. It was but a few moments until time for the train to leave, so he rushed to the gate, flashed his ticket before the eyes of the cautious gateman, and hurried on out to the train.

"Where to, bud?" asked the porter.

"Primton," replied Mickey, hopping up the steps with barely a glance at the questioner.

"You go on into the smoker," called the porter.

The car Mickey entered was an elegantly furnished one, a first-class passenger coach. There was but one thing of momentous interest to him at this time: could the backs of the seats be moved?

He was the first in the car, but already he could hear the anxious queries being hurled at the porter: "Does this car go straight through?—Does this train?—do we?—will we?—how far is——" etc., etc. He grasped the back of a seat and pulled on it. It moved, swung over, and left two seats facing and two backs against each other. On the floor under those backs was a dark, hidden space, large enough for a boy about Mickey's size. Into that space he crawled just as a party of travelers entered.

"Oh, here's some double seats," said one, and in a few moments they were occupied by a gentleman, two ladies, and a little boy. Mickey listened for awhile to the conversation and then, when the train began to pull out, he arranged himself in as com-

fortable a position as possible and settled down for a long ride. With his head pressed close to the floor he listened to the ceaseless click of the wheels as they struck upon the rails of the track. After a short while the click became a hum and still later, when the passengers had all ceased talking, and the porter had turned down the lights until the car was but dimly lit, Mickey heard the rumbling of the moving wheels as if it was the lullaby of a loving mother. His head dropped in a cramped position upon his arm, his eyes closed, and he slept. A little later he stirred slightly in his restless slumber, his head sank into a more restful position and alas! his feet wandered out into the well traveled aisle and lay there unconscious of their latest mission. When the conductor came through the car again to collect tickets from the passengers he came suddenly upon Mickey's ragged feet blocking the passage. He looked at them for a long time, probably ten seconds, maybe fifteen, and then he stooped over and peered into the darkness of the crevice between the backs of two seats. He reached an arm into those frightful shadows and grasping Mickey by the shoulder he shook him gently.

"Piggy, Piggy, wake up or we'll miss the show," Mickey mumbled, and the conductor smiled. He flung over the back of one of the seats leaving Mickey exposed to view.

"Look here!" he whispered to a passenger sitting a few feet away. The passenger came and looked wonderingly at Mickey, then he called to another, who called to another, and they all came and bent over the unconscious cause of much curiosity.

"Who is he?" asked one.

The conductor shook his head, "All the way from Mammothville, I suppose," he commented, as he shook Mickey into consciousness. "Ticket please," he said.

Mickey opened his eyes and dully regarded his tormentor; then, as a ray of intelligence flashed upon him, he drew from his pocket his ticket and handed it to the conductor. The conductor looked at it. "Latchville!" he said.

"Yes, are we most there?" asked Mickey.

"You roll off at the next stop," responded the trainman as he moved away.

"I guess they must have carried me past Latchville," said Mickey.

"You ought to make 'em back up for you, sonny." suggested a passenger.

"Or pay your way back for you," said another.

"They ought to know enough to wake up their passengers at the gettin' off places," persisted Mickey.

"That's what! my boy, if I were you I'd sue the Company for breach of contract. By selling you the ticket they contracted to haul you to and land you in Latchville, and here you are one hundred miles beyond that station."

"I'll do that or—or make 'em haul me back some day," said Mickey in reply, and the smiling passengers returned to their seats.

"Come up here with me, boy," said one, "we land in the same town and we'd better become acquainted."

"Is it a big town?" Mickey asked, seating himself by the friendly gentleman and throwing his feet up into the seat facing them.

"About two thousand people—they don't have any boot-blacks there."

"I'll have to jump a blind and get out pretty quick then. How far is it to Primton?"

"About sixty miles—that's a good big town."

"Yes, I know; one of the boys told me that it is a good town."

The engine gave a long whistle. "Here we are," said the man as the train began to slow up. The conductor came through again. "You get off here!" he said fiercely to Mickey, who looked at his companion and laughed.

"Pretty angry, isn't he," commented the man.

"Awful!" replied Mickey.

They stepped out and stood upon the depot platform. There was no light in the little station. Mickey looked about him. His companion stood away a short distance regarding him with smiling curiosity. "Well, what you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm goin' to Primton," Mickey replied, and with those words he crawled under the cars that were already beginning to move and disappeared. The man shuddered. "I must keep awake here," said Mickey to himself as he fixed himself as best he could upon the beams under the car.

The train gathered speed rapidly and soon the fine dust was flying up into Mickey's face and cutting into the skin. "Oh," he thought, "if I only hadn't stretched my feet out into the aisle!"

It was after about another half hour of travel that the train stopped at a small place. Mickey felt it pulling and backing around and finally his car gave a little jerk, backed up a short distance and stopped. He waited patiently for it to start again, but it did not move. Soon he heard the

other part of the train creeping away. He rolled out and looked ahead. Yes, there were the rear signals of the disappearing train blinking back to him and his car was side tracked in a "Lonelyville." Great high, well treed hills rose to the right of him. By the roar of the train he could tell that it was rushing down a heavy grade. Through the timber at the left he fancied that he could distinguish the promise of waters beyond. He turned and walked back along the track until he came to the station and from there he could dimly see some few shadowy residences scattered about. There was nothing for him to do but wait until morning so he laid down on the planked platform and continued the sleep that had been so rudely terminated in the passenger coach.

CHAPTER XV.

The warm sun beating upon Mickey's exposed face brought him to life in the morning before any other life was visible. He got up, stretched himself, looked for his special car and in amazement noticed that it had disappeared.

For a little while he loafed around the station and then he walked down the track in response to the importunities of a curiosity that told him he should see what was beyond the curve. He went until he had rounded the curve and was repaid by meeting with another one that gave promise of great revelations were he to explore it. That he did with a like disappointing result and in disgust turned back to the station. When he got there he found the place open and a small man seated before a desk working with the telegraph instrument.

"Good morning," said Mickey.

The little man did not reply at once. He made his hand shake over the ticking machine. After a while he shut it off and arose.

"How d'y do, sir?" he said.

"When does the next train go through?" asked Mickey.

"Number 108 will go through in about twenty minutes—she don't stop though unless we have a passenger. Where do you want to go?"

"Aw, I don't want to go nowhere—just wondered."

"Got dumped, eh?"

"Yes, they threw off my car last night."

The little man laughed. "That was a diner," he

said, "No. 3 kicks that off here for No. 4. Didn't you see No. 4 when she went through?"

"No, I must have been asleep."

"She went through about four-forty. Where were you going?"

"I was headed for Primton."

"Twenty-five miles down."

"What place is this?"

"Woolson Park. Judge Woolson owns these lands hereabouts and the lake. There are some of the prettiest spots on the footstool right around here. People come from the cities to summer here. There are half a dozen parties down there now," the agent said, jerking his head toward the left.

Mickey glanced out through the window in the direction indicated, but he could see nothing but timber.

"How far away is the lake?" he asked.

"Only about a mile," was the reply. "The driveway leads right down to it."

"Do you think they'd care if I went down and took a look at it?"

"No, no! anybody can go and do anything he wants to: boat, fish, swim or anything. Where do you live?"

"I come from Mammothville."

"Great Gosh!" exclaimed the agent, "you live in a town, don't you?"

"Yes, it's a big place, but they don't have any lakes there except them that you'll be arrested for falling into, an' you don't dare to step on the grass except on Sundays. Do they allow you to roll on the grass every day here?"

"Gosh yes! You can tear it up and chaw it if

you want to. You can have grass three times a day here."

"You can pull flowers, too?"

"Gosh, yes! you can pull 'em as often as you want to. There's a corner or two in the lake just chuck full of lilies—you know, these big white lilies—you've seen them."

"No."

"Never seen the great big white water lilies?"

"No, they don't grow on Eleventh Street."

"Well, you want to get down there and look at them lilies before you quit this place."

"You know I do," exclaimed the wonderfully excited Mickey.

"If I was you I'd take a roll in the lake and get some of that air line dust out of my face," suggested the little man.

"It drifts up pretty strong against a fellow when he's ridin' the beam," explained Mickey.

"Do you ride the rods, an' the bumpers an' the beams?" the agent asked in surprise.

"Yes, I ride anyhere I can hang; but I'd rather be on the blind, or 'upper deck' than down where the wheels is scrapin' your clothes all the time."

"Say! Excuse me from riding where a car wheel is scrapin' my undershirt and eternity is three inches off—I'd walk first."

"Can I leave this kit in here somewhere?" asked Mickey.

"Certainly, I'll put it right back here and you can get it whenever you want it."

"I think I'll go up town and find something to eat," said the boy.

"There's only one place where you can buy anything," said the agent, "and that's at that first little

joint there where you see the sign hanging out; but if you're begging for grub you might as well tackle the first place you reach."

After partaking of a scanty breakfast Mickey wandered toward the timber and in the direction of the lake. He was slow in his progress, for the way was bordered by depths of curiosities to him. He would turn out to look at a peculiarly shaped tree and then go farther to see what the glaring red thing was that flashed from a vine crawling over a ragged stump. He sat down and reveled in grass pulling it up by the roots and allowing his imagination to testify that the high trees towering above him were monstrous policemen whom he was saucily defying. The hours flew. He stood for a long time watching a mother cow and its calf grazing and then he wandered on down the canopied way until, suddenly, he turned into an opening and was face to face with two gentlemen in fishing attire.

"Hello here, where did you come from?" one of them asked, as if he knew Mickey, and indeed he did. He knew the type and he knew that the boy was in an unfamiliar field.

"I was ditched up here last night," explained Mickey, "an' the fellow in the coop told me about the lake, an' I thinks I'll take a run down an' see it, seein' there ain't no objections from nobody."

"What do you think of that?" asked one of the gentlemen, calling Mickey's attention to a string of fish held by the other.

Mickey looked. He did not know what to say or what to think. In fact he knew nothing about the proper thoughts or words for such an occasion so he said nothing but simply looked.

"Isn't that a fine string?" asked the man.

Mickey had to acknowledge that it was, though at the same time he thought the fish very small. Why, he had seen great fifty pound fish on exhibition in the city, but—well he didn't feel like saying much, and the gentleman being a true sportsman took it for granted that the lad was envious.

"You move on down the road and you'll reach the lake," continued the man, and Mickey traveled on. "Stop in as you come back," shouted the gentleman after him, and Mickey turning saw a little summer cottage nestling back in the woods.

"Well, I guess I will!" he said to himself, "they couldn't hold me from taking a look at that bin! That looks like a chunk out of a stage scene. I wonder if them fellows didn't try to make it look just as pretty as the theatre houses are!"

He strolled on, peering eagerly ahead as he turned each crook in the road in anxious expectation of seeing the lake. He rounded a point and in disappointment saw that there was a long stretch of travel worn path and then another curve. To the left of him was a gently rising grass-cushioned knoll. He glanced up along the side of it and wondered what was beyond, even as he was always wondering about the never ceasing curves. He turned from the road, stepped into the cool damp grass and then fell upon his knees and crawled a few feet. The grass touched pleasantly upon his dust-torn hands. He thrust his face into it and bit at it as he had seen the cow do.

"Grass is cheap here," he said, "cheaper than Nick's old apple pies, cheaper than dirt, cheaper than water; I wish Piggy was here."

He climbed on up the little hill and touched the

top, looking back at the pretty scene below and then he turned and looked beyond.

"Oh-h-h-h!" he said, and "Oh-h-h-h!" again.

He was looking out over the white waters of the broad lake. The green sward stretched steadily down to the very edge of the waters and the perfume from the breast of Lady's Lake was pure and cool and fragrant. Down the hill a little distance a young woman sat upon a camp stool. Moored at the edge of the water was a tiny boat on which were the shining blue letters: D-A-I-S-Y.

Mickey rushed down. He saw only the little boat and the lake, and toward them he pressed rapidly, stopping suddenly when he heard a pleasant voice call. Turning, he saw the lady. Upon her knees she held a large tablet, and in her hand a pencil. Mickey moved toward her.

"How do you do, sir? Are you going far?" she asked laughingly, for the boy's haste had amused her.

"I was just goin' to take a squint at the floater," explained Mickey.

"Go, get in it and sit still facing me, will you?"

Mickey ran and jumped into the boat. It rocked furiously, and he almost tumbled over into the water.

"Take care!" shouted the lady. "You must not try to explore the bottom of the lake. 'Submarine observations prohibited here', that's the rule. Sit right down on that centre seat—that's right—now be quiet until I get you." Mickey obeyed orders faithfully—he wanted to be "got." For several minutes he sat in fearful, rigid silence, and then the artist called to him:

"That will do; come up and look at yourself."

He went, and standing by the lady looked at the piece of hasty drawing. The boat looked very natural, so did the waters of the lake, but the boy—

"Do I look like that?" asked he.

"You should look like that," she replied with a smile, "but you see I didn't want to go to the expense of dirtying your face and spoiling your clothes, so I saved pencil wear. Your features and figure are good. The present decorations and trimmings are slightly soiled."

Mickey walked back to the lake, threw off his coat, unbuttoned his collar at the neck, and dipping his hands into the waters proceeded to wash his face and neck while his new acquaintance regarded him curiously. After he had scrubbed a while she arose and untying a white apron from her waist carried it to him with instructions that he should use it as a towel. Mickey spluttered an unavailing protest and came through the renovating process in good form.

"Now," said the lady, "I have taken your picture, you must take mine. I will get into the boat, pull out from the shore a little, and you must make a drawing of me."

Mickey looked at her intently while she stepped about, unmooring the boat and then, at her request, he gave it a little shove and she drifted out a few rods.

"Don't keep me here very long," she said, and she posed as if a master artist were about to transfer her graceful likeness to canvas. Mickey got the camp stool, tablet, and pencil, and took them near to the edge of the lake. He spread the tablet on the stool and sank upon his knees, facing the smiling model. For many moments he worked in

silence, now glancing at the boat and its occupant, and then back to his sheet over which he labored with tongue-hanging interest. The lady's growing curiosity to know what he would eventually produce encouraged her to a patient waiting, though the sun was beating down upon her fiercely.

After a while she said: "It is so hot out here I guess I must come in and get my parasol—I left it up the hill a little way."

She pulled the boat ashore and went to look at Mickey's work. "The paper ain't clean enough for your face," explained he, "an' you're a whole lot purtier than that, but I can't make it show—I guess the pencil ain't the right color."

She was looking over his shoulder at the work. "What a flatterer you are!" she exclaimed, and then she looked more closely at his drawing, and with surprise. Why, truly, there was a likeness! He had succeeded in accomplishing a great deal more than she had anticipated; in fact, she had expected nothing. "Why! you have a little of the artist genius," she continued, "you have done well."

"Genius, Genius!" Where had Mickey heard that word before? Oh, yes, on the street. Somebody had said, "a little bit of genius—whole worlds of work." Did he have a little bit of genius?

"May I have it?" asked the lady.

"I'd like to make you a good one," said Mickey.

"Maybe you shall this afternoon, or some other time. Where did you learn to draw?"

"Aw, just learned it. Where is the big white flowers that the guy told me about?"

"Water lilies? They're around the lake here just a short distance. Can you row?"

"Yes, mam."

"We'll go for some."

Mickey held the boat while with drawn skirts the young woman stepped into it, and he steadied it very carefully while she walked to the seat at the stern; then he gave it a little push and jumped in himself just as he had seen boat tenders do on the river, but he landed in a different manner. He got only one foot into the boat, the other hung in the water and the boat was tipped until it was almost ready to dip. The lady screamed a little and then laughed gayly, while Mickey dragged his immersed foot from the lake and crawled to his seat. The water rattled in his shoe.

"Take it off," advised his companion, "it will be dried by the time we have made our trip."

Mickey heeded the advice and revealed a foot that had long been in need of its late experience. He grasped the oars in his hands and attempted to manipulate them.

"Where did you learn to row?" the lady asked.

"This is my first lesson," replied Mickey, shamefully.

"I thought so," said she, and then she gave him some few directions that helped him much, and in a very few moments he was making the boat move nicely.

They went quite a distance along the shore and came to a place where the lake jutted into a lily-grown pond. Mickey pulled the boat in among the great lily leaves which kept catching on his oars and making him splash water into the boat.

His companion held her parasol down so he could not see her face, and he wondered if she were angry with him because of his awkwardness.

"That will do," she said finally, and he rested on

his oars. All about them were the beautiful lilies and they gathered a number of them.

"They don't cost a cent?" asked the boy.

"No, they are as free as the air of the mountain. Did you think they would cost us something?"

"Yes, mam; flowers like these cost lots of money in Mammothville."

"Oh, I should say they do! You came from Mammothville, did you?" Mickey told her he did, and in response to her inquiries revealed the fact that he had ridden on the floor of a railway car part of the way, and on the brake beam the rest of his journey.

"And that is what makes the lake water so muddy," she said, glancing at his dirty foot.

"Yes, mam," he admitted, "a fellow can't keep himself dressed up while he's bummin' over the road."

Mickey rowed back, fighting the incessant inclination of the boat to go out into the centre of the lake, much to the amusement of his passenger. "You'll learn," she said as they landed, "only I must wear a water-proof next time you take me out on a pleasure trip," and she glanced half ruefully at the water splashes on her dress.

"I'm sorry," was all Mickey could say.

"You needn't be—my husband splashes me for meanness."

They gathered the camp stool and artist's utensils and were starting up the hill just as the man who had spoken to Mickey earlier in the day came into view.

"It's about time!" he said to the lady. "Jack and I have got the finest fish dinner up there you ever saw. Well, sonny, did you see the lake to a finish?"

"Yes, sir."

"Paul, come and look at this!" The gentleman went and standing beside her looked at Mickey's drawing.

"Pretty good!" he said, "The kid did it, eh? Well, well! Kid you're all right; but what did you try to make an actress out of her for? You've got actress on the brain. Nelly is no stage star." And then the gentleman said to his wife: "That boy can make something out of himself if he'll only work, but the trouble with such boys is they will not work. They are born into the world with the same talents that are common to those of different birth, but their surroundings ruin them. The boy in his drawing there makes you look a great deal like a cheap actress—that is because he has been studying cigarette chromos. If he were to attempt to draw a likeness of me he would get a little of the likeness all right probably, but he would also insist on making me look like a pugilist, or a bar tender. His talent, too, might as well be wasted as but half developed. He hasn't enough to get him anywhere unless he settles down to downright drudgery, and that he will not do. If he would, though, if he would work he could some day be where Bradford of the *Herald* is now, right at the top of the heap! Bradford had no start at all; hewed his way right through solid granite."

They soon came to the road and as they turned into it, they glanced back at Mickey, who was hobbling along a few feet away, apparently unconscious of the gentleman's words, but he had heard every sentence spoken. He had heard with increasing faith the ringing command: "work, work,

work!" There was no escaping that fate if he would succeed.

"Why don't you put on your shoe?" the lady asked, for Mickey had not yet replaced the shoe that had been filled with muddy lake water.

"The grass is so good to the feel of my feet," explained he, but he slipped it on then for he was about to step into the road. As they drew nearer to the cottage that Mickey had noticed as he went down to the lake they heard merry sounds coming therefrom. The boy turned away toward the little station and it was only when his companions were at the threshold of their destination that they noticed the disappearing lad. He was looking back longingly toward the little cottage.

"Why!" said the lady.

"Here, kid; come here!" called the man.

Mickey went toward them.

"Where were you going?" the lady asked.

"I was goin' up to see if I could get out before night."

"And you're tired of us so soon?" she asked, so sorrowfully that Mickey felt almost ashamed, and explained as best he could that he was not tired of the woods, and the lake and the flowers and the lady and the gentleman, nor was he tired of anything, only he didn't want to be in the way.

"You come in!" said the man, and he spoke so threateningly that Mickey knew he must go. He was introduced to a number of persons who were seated about a table partaking of the fish dinner, and he was made to sit down with the group and partake of the wonderful meal, while his drawing was passed from one to another with various pleasant comments.

The boy spent the whole afternoon on the lake and around its borders. The beauties grew upon and into him. Long afterward when his mental scene-field was crowded with the pick-ups of myriad experiences, the broad white lake with its beautifully treed borders, the lily pond, and the fern-clad shadowy little recesses of straying gullies stood out clearly in his mental view and he remembered the beautiful lady and one other: a little girl with blue socks, as the only living objects fit to be seen upon the sacred canvas.

When No. 3 stopped that night to drop the diner for No. 4, Mickey climbed to the top of a car, hoping that as the train passed on down toward Primton he might catch a night glimpse of the lake. And it was as he had hoped, but there was no smile on the face of the waters. With the night they had taken on a sullen darkness and Mickey turned and looked away.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was five years before Mickey again landed in Mammothville; five years that were filled with many adventures, all the well fitted, component parts of a richly educative experience. Mickey's earlier lessons were not lost in the later multiplying episodes in his career. The consistent, well substantiated advice of Mr. Arthur Morgan was ever in his mind, and the fate-foretelling examples of those who had frequented "The Joint" he remembered without encouragement. As he stepped from the train and pressed with the great throng out toward the station gates a casual acquaintance of five years ago would not have known him.

Ah, but Mickey had changed! He was almost full grown in height, and he walked rapidly, for it was a chilly spring morning and, while he was dressed neatly, yet he wore no over-coat and there was a justified suspicion that his underclothing was scant. He carried a small grip in one hand and the other grasped an indispensable roll. The hands were tightly gloved and a little circle of white flesh shone at the wrist and a soiled cuff peeped out from the arm of a short sleeved coat. There was an odd expression on the young man's face and the unknowing were puzzled in its interpretation. They glanced at him curiously, for he demanded attention, and then they wondered "why."

A lively hackman leaped toward him and with his hand upon Mickey's grip said: "Have a hack, sir?"

"Carriage waitin' at the corner," replied Mickey

with a grim smile and the hackman turned to other possible patrons.

Mickey pressed on, but there was no carriage waiting at the corner for him, nor did he hail a street car and ride on it. He walked, and as he walked he whistled softly to himself and glanced with interest at familiar points along the street. After awhile he stopped whistling and walked thoughtfully along.

"All you want to eat here for fifteen cents!" Mickey heard a semi-familiar voice call. He glanced up and saw Burt Craige standing at the door of a dirty looking chop house and singing his short line to every passer.

"I'm not hungry enough to eat in there if it were a free lunch," thought Mickey, and then he remembered his dollar and fifteen cents that had never been returned and he wondered if he could collect it at that time. He turned to speak to Craige——

"Yes, sir! go right in, sir! only fifteen cents, sir! All you can eat, sir!"

Mickey turned away. The fellow did not know him and the thought touched Mickey that such a person was best as a stranger.

"Five cents buys a cup of coffee, rolls and butter, friend!" Burt called after the retreating young man, but Mickey was gone.

"So much for Craige," he thought. "Five years have left him where he was when they began—the same catch-as-catch-can way of making his living. He's no better off than I!" But he almost wished he had stopped and talked with Burt. He would have liked to ask about Pink and Kid and Morgan and Fatty Gripp and Nick and a hundred other old time acquaintainces, but he could ask Nick.

Well! What a change on Eleventh Street!

Mickey was in the vicinity of Nick's place and he was amazed at the alterations that had been made since his departure. The streets were smoothly paved and swept clean as a ball room floor. Bright signs hung across the pavements and beautiful displays made visual entertainment in the broad windows of the store buildings. Old blocks had been torn down and large new ones built in their stead. Mickey whistled in amazement as a bran new electric car rushed up through the street.

"I'll bet I won't find Nick," was his mental comment. "He's off on some side street fakin' it—he's never kept up to this pace."

He looked forward eagerly; it was only about a block to where "The Joint" used to be. Was there a "Joint" any more? He would soon know.

A few quick steps and he stood before what was once "The Joint." The same door and whole store front, in fact, was resplendent with a lately applied coat of black paint with white trimmings. One window was decorated with canned and bottled goods while the other was filled with books and periodicals.

Mickey, looking in, saw a clean, bright floor, fancy counters and show cases, beautifully arranged shelves, and an artistically decorated ceiling. There was some activity there, too. A neatly dressed little woman was tying up some buns for an awaiting customer; a boy was filling a display basket with oranges; a delivery man was starting out to the street with a couple of baskets of groceries in his hands, and a finely dressed gentleman was glancing over the periodicals exhibited on the news counter.

Mickey went in. The little woman stepped to him as her other customer turned away.

"Good morning," she said pleasantly; "can I do anything for you this morning?"

"I'll take this, Mrs. Delaney," said the gentleman at the news counter, and at the same time he dropped a quarter into her hand and showed her the cover of a monthly magazine.

"Thank you," she said, and again turned to Mickey, who was on the verge of mental collapse in an endeavor to reconcile himself to the thought that possibly he was about to address Mrs. Nick Delaney.

"I would like to see Nick," he said. "Nick and I are old acquaintances. I have just got back this morning after an absence of five years from the city and am hunting up old friends."

"Nick is up stairs—I will call him; he will be awfully pleased to see you, I know," Mrs. Delaney said smilingly as she stepped to the rear of the store and spoke into a speaking tube.

"Nick," she cried, and then, after waiting a few seconds, continued, "Why, there's a young gentleman down here that wants to see you——just let it go, I'll be right up.——Yes.——No.——Billy's here——! He'll be right down," she said, turning to Mickey, and he heard the quick steps of a man upon an unseen stairway, and then Nick swung into sight through a door very nearly in the place where the old hive door had been.

Nick went forward looking curiously at Mickey. Mickey smiled; the smile expanding into a broad grin as he realized that he had grown away from Nick's remembrance.

"Have Pink and Kid been around this morning?" he asked.

"Well, angels and ministers! if here ain't Mickey!" Nick exclaimed, rushing to him and grasping a hand in both of his. "Why Mick, I'd just about given you up. How are you anyway? Well, well! You've changed! Minnie, come here."

Mrs. Delaney, who had been standing watching the greetings with a pleased interest went toward her husband. "Minnie, this is Mickey Peck—you've heard me speak of him. My wife, Mr. Peck."

Mrs. Delaney extended her hand with: "Well, I should think I have. He has spoken about you often, Mr. Peck. I'm glad to meet you."

"Yes, Mickey," continued Nick, "you've always hung around in my memory pretty close, and I've wished a thousand times that I hadn't let you leave here when you did. Well, you've lengthened out haven't you—I'll wait on her, Minnie: you get acquainted with Mickey."

"And you've been away five years?" asked Mrs. Delaney.

"Yes," replied Mickey, "it will be six years this summer since I left."

"Things have changed some, haven't they?"

"Yes, indeed, and for the better, too, I——"

"Oh, Mr. Peck, have you had your breakfast?"

"No," replied Mickey, "but I'll step out in a few moments and get a little lunch."

"No, you won't," said the little woman; "you come right upstairs with me. Nick has just finished and I'll get you something to eat."

Mickey made a few happily ineffectual protests

and then followed Mrs. Delaney up the stairs and into their cozy living rooms.

"You just step in there and sit down a little while," she said, her voice lowered, "and I will see what I can get for you."

Mickey stepped into the room indicated and found himself in a cozy sitting room. He sank down into an easy chair and glanced about at the pretty furnishing.

"Nick must have struck a run of luck," thought he. "This is a kind of little heaven," and just then the portiere at one side of the room was thrust aside and a child aged about three years, clad in a flowing robe of white, stepped into Mickey's presence. She stood silently regarding him for a few aeons, according to the young man's reckoning, and then asked: "Where's mamma?" and quickly added:

"I know who you is; you's the man what runs the merry-go-wound."

She was mistaken. Mickey was firm in his belief that she was mistaken. He did not run a merry-go-round—had not for over two years. True, about two years before, during a few weeks of the summer he had officiated as fare collector on a merry-go-round, but not in Mammothville. No, he had been far away from Mammothville at that time. It was evident that here was a horrible case of mistaken identity, so Mickey quickly explained to the child that he was not a merry-go-round boy.

"Is you the man what says: 'up—up, down—down'?"

"No, I'm not one of the up and down boys, either," explained Mickey.

"Why, Etta! you up bothering Mr. Peck!" exclaimed Mrs. Delaney, at that moment stepping in

to call Mickey out to the dining room. "Come on, Mr. Peck," she continued, and Mickey went, outwardly reluctant; inwardly ravenous.

She had fried some ham and eggs for him. A dish of jelly, a plate of soft fluffy bread and sweet butter, and a cup of steaming hot coffee, from which a delightful aroma drifted, were placed before him.

After awhile Mickey said to Mrs. Delaney, who had seated her little daughter at the opposite side of the table and was administering as best she could to the little ones promiscuous wants: "Everything you have tastes so good, Mrs. Delaney."

The lady smiled. Why shouldn't she? Isn't it about time for a woman to smile when people begin to compliment her cooking? Has the average woman many other household accomplishments that are liable to offer openings for commendatory remarks? She might be pleased if one were to say to her: "Mrs. Jones, you make your beds nicely!" or, "Mrs. Smith, you have a lovely way of sweeping your floors!" or, "Mrs. Burns, really, you spank your offspring in quite an artistic manner!" or, "Mrs. Black, how white your clothes are when they come out of the suds!" or, "Mrs. Price, what a charming way you have of washing your dishes!" Such remarks might please the average woman, but if you expect her to smile upon you; fall in love with you; bow down to you and serve you; tell her that everything she cooks tastes "so good!"

Mickey had won a victory. He had touched the right key at the first attempt and he had not strained his conscience a hair's breadth in so doing; for Mrs. Delaney was a good cook, though Mickey was not at this time a fit person to pass judgment upon the work of any kitchen queen, for he was hungry—

awfully, frightfully, ravenously hungry! He had not had his fill of good things for many a day and even at this time an overpowering sense of the fitness of things impelled him to stop eating when everything eatable was gone.

"Shall I fry you another egg, Mr. Peck?—and I'll get you another slice of ham, too."

"No, no," interposed Mickey, "don't you do it!"

What was the use? Why put the kind woman to so much trouble? And what would one more little hen's egg and another slice of ham be to that great gaping pit, Mickey's stomach?

"No, don't," continued Mickey, for she was half inclined to disobey his orders. "I have had a fine big breakfast."

"I half believe you are hungry still," said Mrs. Delaney.

"No," continued Mickey, "you must not think, just because I ate everything in sight, that I am not satisfied. I formed the habit years ago of eating everything in reach every time I get a chance. It was often so long between meals you know—I had to look out for the future."

Mickey went down stairs and after a little while Nick was at leisure, and they sat down to talk over the past.

"How did all this happen, Nick?" Mickey asked, waving his hand around and finally pointing his fingers to where they could hear the gentle touch of feet on the floor above.

"Why," said Nick laughing, "I wasn't pullin' double when you left, was I? Well I guess not! It must have been six months after you left before Minnie and I went to roomin' together. Yes, it was about six months—that's right! But I was

sittin' up nights with her once in a while and going to meetings with her on Sundays even before you left, but maybe you didn't know it."

"No, I didn't," acknowledged Mickey, "and I supposed you'd be lonesome after all us fellows ducked."

"Nit. I wasn't lonesome a little bit! I was in it to a finish. I just camped on her trail worse than ever after the gang cleared out, and finally I landed her, and I made a catch, too. She's a prize package!"

"I should think so!" commented Mickey. "Where did you meet her?"

"Why it was this way: one evening I was strolling down the street and I hears music and sees a little crowd gathered around a large covered wagon. Well, I goes over and there were a half dozen men and women standing up in the wagon singing and a mighty pretty young woman playing on a little organ that was braced up at the back end of the rig. Well, that little woman was Minnie. She took my eye from the start, and I hung around there all evening. They would sing a while and then take turns talking to the crowd about their souls. While the talking was going on, of course, Minnie didn't have to finger the music box, so she'd sit and look around. I got a pretty good squint at her face, and the more I saw of it the more it took my fancy; but she didn't give me more than a cold glance for a while, because, as she told me afterwards, there was always some smart guy standin' around tryin' to start an eye talk with her. When they closed the services that night I steps up to one of the push and says: 'Where are you going to be tomorrow night? I like your talks and want to hear more of

them.' Of course, that landed the old gent, and he asked me my name, and I told him, and then he says: 'Sister McDuff, shake hands with brother Molaney'; 'Delaney', I explained, as Sister McDuff shook hands with me. 'What is the name, please?' she asked. 'Delaney', I said again. 'I am glad to meet you, brother Draney', said she, and then she turned to another woman and said: 'Sister Pratt, meet brother Draney'. Sister Pratt said: 'How do you do, brother Blayney, I am glad to see you here this evening—you must meet my niece. Minnie come here!' She turned to the young lady who was standing a few feet away. Minnie came toward us. 'Minnie, this is brother Blayney', said Sister Pratt, and the young lady bowed to me prettily, and said: 'Are you any kin to the Raneys that live on Park Avenue?' 'If we are related at all, it is a very distant relationship', I explained, and then I turned to Sister Pratt and gives her the long talk, because I saw it wasn't going to be the proper thing for me to sail in for the girl on the start. I found out that they sometimes had the meetings on the open street and sometimes in a joint down on Vine Street, and that Minnie did the organ act for them all the time. Just as I started away the young woman dropped her music book out of the wagon and I picked it up and handed it to her. She said: 'thank you' with a mighty sweet smile and I was gone sure thing. I might fill a hundred and fifty pages, both sides, telling you about my campaign, but business won't permit. The long and short of it is, I got pretty religious during the fall and winter, and the next spring Minnie and I hung our clothes up in the same closet. I've worked a straight graft ever since, and this is what

I've got," Nick concluded, waving his hand around, and finally pointing up toward the ceiling as Mickey had done.

"I guess the straight graft is the only sure thing," said Mickey.

"That's no idle dream!" Nick said, "and it's a kind of a heavenly feeling—the sensation you have when you can look a cop right square in the blinkers without battin' an eye. I'm doin' a fifteen thousand dollar business in this little place here, and taking no chances in the act; that's better than thirty thousand and back bone chills every time a blue garment flits past the front window."

"How's your cough?"

"Cough? Why there was the greatest joke about that you ever see. That bark of mine peeled off. Yes! ducked with the gang. I forgot all about it as soon as the little woman began working on me. I haven't coughed up a lung fragment for four years. On the quiet, Mickey, it was 'booze' that made me cough. Minnie up there made me shake the 'booze' and the cough shook me. I see a fellow yesterday with the same cough, the very same one I used to have. It had him doubled up against a bill board and he was makin' more noise than a sea lion—" A man carrying a grip entered the store. "There," observed Nick, "do you see that mark? He comes in here to sell me something I don't want. I might as well go right up and bite. I wish I didn't have a ten cent credit in the city—it'd save me a lot of bother." Nick went forward and grasped the outstretched hand of the drummer.

Mickey watched the two men for a while and

then carried his baggage to an out of the way place, in the rear corner, and opened the indispensable roll.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I shook him," said Nick, again joining Mickey in a few minutes. "What you got there?"

"Samples."

"Samples?"

"Yes, they are to show what I can do, and they're poor enough, too. Say, Nick, would you mind if I make a picture of your little girl?"

"You didn't make those pictures!"

Mickey had spread out before him a few crayon pencil portraits.

"Yes, they don't amount to anything. Here's where the hard work comes in. I like to do this," Mickey said, as he unrolled a sheet of paper and showed Nick a dainty little pen and ink sketch. "I like the black and white work," he continued, as he unrolled another picture. "Do you know who that is?"

"Well, I should say yes; that's the little crip you had on your string. When did you make that picture?"

"Oh, a year or two ago; but, of course, it isn't very good, it's only from memory; but he was an easy one to remember. Do you know this one?"

Nick looked carefully at the next picture, a simple combination of pen strokes in black, revealing the face of a young man, but he did not know him. He shook his head. Mickey was disappointed.

"I meant it for Mr. Morgan," he said.

"Oh," exclaimed Nick, "how should I know his picture! I never saw him but once or twice."

"Where is he?" asked Mickey.

"He's on top; managing editor of the *Herald*."

Mickey was not surprised to hear that. He brought up another drawing.

"Now, I've got you," exclaimed Nick, glancing at it. "It's Pink!"

Mickey smiled. Nick was right. After all, his memory sketches were not so bad.

"Where did you learn to do that?" asked Nick.

"Just kept pegging away at it," explained Mickey. "A fellow learns something new every time he picks up a pen or pencil, and I picked them up so often that after a while I got so I could draw a little. I ain't in it yet. I'm nowhere! but the work has fed me all the same. My best graft now is soaping windows."

"How's that?"

"Why, you see I take the common laundry soap and ornament windows with it. It'll stick for a week or two and then you can wash it off."

"I never saw any of the work," said Nick.

"Oh, yes you have, only you didn't know it. I'll show you."

Mickey dug into his grip and drew up a piece of soap; then he and Nick stepped to the front, and with a few smooth flourishes he placed on the window in pretty transparent letters: "Fresh Bread, Buns and Butter."

"That's out of sight!" commented Nick. "Yes, I've seen such work before, but I thought it was glass work."

"No, it's soap," said Mickey; "common old soap. I'll fix your other window for you. It looks fine by gas light." They stepped to the other side of the store front. "What shall I put here?"

"Oh, just put on, 'Books and Magazines,' that'll do."

"Gosh, but I had a time learning to spell," commented Mickey, as he flourished the soap over the window.

"Whew!" whistled Nick, "that's pretty!" And, indeed it was. The letters appeared in ground glass effect, and so symmetrically were they outlined, and with such beautifying flourishes, that Nick was delighted with the work. A neighboring storekeeper had been watching and came to inspect more closely.

"Pretty," he said to Nick. "What does the boy charge?"

Mickey had returned to the first window he had worked, and was making some additional decorations. He heard the man's inquiry.

"Fifty cents a window, for the first job and twenty-five cents each, thereafter," he said. The gentleman replied with a motion, and Mickey followed him.

"You see, friend, this isn't a permanent letter, it's only for a few days use." Nick heard the young artist explain. After a few moments Mickey returned.

"That was easy," he said; "a plunk!"

It was arranged that Mickey was to room at the Delaney home. A spare room could be easily given over to him, and an outside entrance promised a convenience that would be handy for all persons concerned. Mickey's few belongings were taken to his room and under the ingenious direction of Mrs. Delaney the apartment soon assumed a cosiness that warmed Mickey's heart. "What a place to work!" he said to himself in delight as he looked

about him in his new home, and then he went down into the store.

"Nick, how much will you charge me for the room?" he asked.

"Why, you'll have to see Minnie about that," replied Nick, "she knows more about such things than I do."

Mickey laughed. "That is just what your wife said about you," he replied.

He stepped out and wandered about the streets in an endeavor to satisfy his curiosity concerning certain remembered spots. As might be expected things were not as they had once seemed to him. Buildings that had then seemed massive in proportions were now dwarfed by the larger ones that had grown up about them. Quiet corners where he had been wont to pause and devour a nickel's worth of ginger cakes were now busy with business life and the hurry and hustle drove him on in search of other landmarks.

He came to the corner where he had, for so many weeks, solicited boot-black patronage and there he found a beautifully canopied stand under which two colored boys were located, and one of them was Sam, grown to manhood, but still blacking shoes. Mickey's heart pained for him a little, but why should it? There was not, if appearances counted for anything, a happier mortal in Mammothville than this same boot-black, Sam.

"You'll have to get off this corner, it belongs to me," said Mickey, stepping up and tapping the negro on the shoulder. Sam turned half angrily and looked at the intruder. "Yes, sir," continued his tormentor, "this corner belongs to me, and I'm

going to have my corner if I have to get Fatty Gripp to help me chase you niggers out."

The few exclamatory remarks made by Sam as he recognized Mickey were the emphatic expression of heartfelt cordiality, and as he grasped Mickey's none reluctant hand he said: "Well, chute de chute if dis ain't Mickey! Why, say, buddy, I tot you was done gone. Where's you been?"

"I've been all around, sizin' up the world, Sam. What I haven't seen won't draw any gate money at all."

"You's lookin' spruce."

"It's most all looks now, Sam."

"Is you ha'd up?"

"Well, I'm not flashing any white rocks, am I?"

Sam drew the money drawer from his stand and handed it to Mickey. Mickey laughingly took a dollar.

"I owes you two, strong," said the negro offering him another.

"No, one is plenty," replied Mickey; "it's just like finding it anyway. I wouldn't touch you at all if I didn't need money to get working stock.

"Is you skinnin' all comers?"

"No, I'm working."

"Den of course you's ha'd up; neveh see a workin' man dat ain' ha'd up!"

"How about you?" asked Mickey, laughing.

"Aw," said Sam, "dis ain' work, dis is play."

"Well, my labors are kind of a combination, too," said Mickey, turning away."

"Dere's a long filler," said Sam to his companion, as Mickey moved out of hearing, "he's a pat hand. When he stays, fall out!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

That evening, after Mickey had gone to his bed, and little Etta, too, was snugly tucked away, Nick and his wife tarried whisperingly over a small table in their kitchen. Their conversation had to do with Mickey, and a certain enigmatical stranger who had visited their store for the first time about eighteen months after Mickey had left town on his five year tour. It was but a few weeks after the marriage of Nick and Minnie, and the wife in the yet unwaning ecstasy of the honeymoon persisted in lingering much in the store.

A man paused one day at the window in which were displayed the magazines of the month, and after scanning them for a few moments he entered the store. Nick was busy, and Minnie stepped forward to wait on the customer. He asked permission to look at one of the magazines, and while he was so doing Minnie stood near by, hummingly watching her husband in his quick movements about the store. The stranger heard the soft sweet tones of her voice and glanced at her in an interested manner.

"What time is it, Minnie?" Nick asked. "I promised to send some berries over to Essleys by 3.30."

"Minnie lifted a time piece from her belt pocket. It was the little watch that Mickey had left in Nick's care, and his wife frequently wore it. It was a rather striking little timepiece, odd in shape, and set in the center of the front side of the case was the letter 'A' in bright little red stones, while right

above it was a small diamond. The red 'A' stood out prettily conspicuous and the gentleman watching Minnie caught a glimpse of the watch, a flash of the red 'A,' and in an instant his attitude changed. He made a quick movement toward her, his hand extended toward the watch. In surprise, and with some fear, Mrs. Delaney backed away.

"Nick," she called, in a rather excited tone.

"I beg your pardon," the gentleman said, quite quickly recovering himself. "I did not mean to startle you. Your little watch—I saw the face of it—the red 'A'. Maybe I was mistaken."

Nick was now by his wife's side. Minnie pressed the little watch into his hand.

"I didn't mean to frighten her," the stranger continued to Nick. "It seems presumptuous in me, I know. How could she have it! but is there a red 'A' on the face of the watch?"

"There is," admitted Nick, eyeing the gentleman closely, and in the brief instant of his observation rather clearing his mind of any violent suspicions. "Yes, there's a red 'A' on the face of the watch with a little diamond at the top of the letter.

The gentleman's face paled a little. "Would you —would you let me look at it?" he asked, and in such a tone of honest supplication that Nick handed the watch to him at once.

The man grabbed it nervously and then as he looked again upon the face of the watch his hands trembled. He opened the back of the watch, and this seemed to puzzle him. He looked in despair upon what had once been an engraved line or two, and then he opened the lid that covered the works, and there on the inside of that lid was the picture of a little girl of about three years of age. At the

sight of this the gentleman turned a questioning face to Nick, who with his wife was a perplexed observer of the stranger's actions.

Nick had never told his wife the story of the watch in detail, and she now looked to him inquiringly. He felt, too, that the situation was one which required some diplomacy. He felt that there was, perhaps, something involved; a disgraced name, maybe; a family skeleton of hideous form.

"The watch was left with me to keep," Nick observed, speaking slowly and thoughtfully. "It was left with me by a woman—it might have been stolen."

"Where is the woman?" the man asked, now in a guarded agitation.

"Dead," replied Nick.

A customer here gave Nick a chance to get away for a few moments, and while he abstractedly waited on the customer he pondered over the situation in hand.

His sole thought was an effort to decide how much he should tell this man. After all, who was Lil?

For several moments the strange gentleman sat thoughtfully on the edge of the small counter in the window. He held the watch clasped lightly in his hand. When Nick again came forward the man seemed to have steadied his emotions a little, for he spoke guardedly, as if fearful that he had been premature in his earlier deductions. In fact, he spoke as one who was steeling himself for disappointment.

"You knew nothing special about this woman?" he asked. "She had no children—there wasn't a little boy——"

"The woman—whose name was Lil, was a well known street woman," said Nick bluntly. "She left the watch with me to give to a little boot-black, Mickey Peck by name. She had taken a fancy to the boy. She seemed to be interested in him 'specially,'" Nick added with emphasis, eyeing the man rather closely, but the man's face now gave out no secrets, although he listened with a strained intensity."

"Mickey used to sleep back there," continued Nick, pointing to the rear of his store, "and that's the reason this Lil left the watch with me. She knew I'd see him—she sent it to me through the mail," Nick thoughtfully inserted, turning to his wife, upon whose face there was a slightly troubled expression. Mrs. Delaney's face brightened at once and Nick continued to the gentleman:

"I gave the watch to Mickey, and in a few days he brought it back to me and asked me to keep it for him. That was over a year ago. He told me that he was going to 'duck' and he did."

"And you haven't seen, or heard from him since?"

"You never do hear from boys like him. They just show up again some day."

"You know nothing about his parents?"

"No, I don't know anything about him, except that his name is Mickey Peck, and his folks is dead. He is a bright little kid, though—a little too bright for his own good, I'm afraid. He left town here just after they shut the lid down, and climbed on top of it."

"A shadow of keen disappointment passed over the man's face. "I suppose," he said, "there's no one around here whom you know who knows anything about this woman Lil."

"No, she was an entire stranger to me," Nick said with some pride. "I never saw her but a few times—I only knew her by reputation."

"And the boy, you're sure his parents are dead—you knew them?"

"No, I didn't know them; I never saw them. They were dead before I knew Mickey. He told me about them."

"What did he tell you?"

"Well, I don't remember much about that, it isn't real clear. He must have had some parents, though."

"Yes," admitted the gentleman, "he must have had parents, but who are they?"

Nick turned away to attend to his regular duties, admitting to himself that the interview with the stranger had not afforded the diversion he had hoped for.

After a short while the man approached Nick in a manner which indicated that he had reached a sort of a conclusion as to what to do. "This watch," he said, "is in your keeping, but I presume you would permit me to make some investigation concerning it, providing I secure you abundantly against loss?"

Nick hesitated. "It isn't mine," he said finally. "I hold it in trust, but I don't want to block any investigations. Yes, you ought to put up something to cover it good and plenty if you want to take it away from here. I've got to do right by Mickey."

A jeweler was sought, the value of the watch was determined and the strange gentleman deposited twice its value in cash with Nick. Some ten days after he again appeared at the store and returned the watch.

"It has been positively identified," he said to Nick. "I sent it east to the family from which it was stolen. I must know more about this woman and about the boy. You are to keep the watch until he claims it or will voluntarily release it to its owner. Heaven knows it's not the watch they're hunting for.

Nick tried as diligently as he could to get additional facts bearing upon the case from his strange visitor, but he failed. He succeeded only in encouraging the man in a more ambiguous attitude. He was, however, genteel at all times and reasonable. For months he was a frequent visitor at the store, making his periodical visits in the hope that he would find Mickey back at his old haunts again. But in that he failed. Mickey seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Gradually the visits grew farther and farther apart until but a few weeks before Mickey's return the stranger had stopped off to see Nick as he made a long cross country trip, and when he learned that Mickey had not returned yet, and had not been heard from, he rather petulantly said:

"I'm tired of the whole business. I never saw another like it. Twice I've been right on the edge of something big and then I've come up against a stone wall. I traced the woman and then lost her, and then found her again, dead. I got a trace of a boy. He may not be the kid at all. It looks as if the big thing of my life has gone a glimmering."

Nick listened with a quickened curiosity, but the man said little more, excepting to give an eastern address to which Nick was to write in case Mickey should again be located, and to incidentally remark that he was booked for a cross sea trip that would

keep him out of the country for several months. "I'm in bad on this, now. They think I'm stalling," was his final comment. And Nick was bewildered in the consideration of the words.

And now Nick and Minnie faced an altered situation. Mickey was back home again. His appearance brought with it a new responsibility to them. Who was the stranger? What might, or might not he know about Lil? Could either of them in any way effect Mickey? In discussing the various phases of the case the husband and wife naturally drifted back in their conversation to their meeting with the strange man, the odd coincidence in connection with the watch, and that prompted Minnie to bring the watch forth again, and together they looked over it curiously. Opening the back case Minnie glanced at the picture of the little girl.

"They look a little alike," she casually remarked.

"What?" asked Nick, speaking in such a startlingly abrupt way that Minnie glanced up at him curiously.

"Yes, I never saw Mickey until today, you know —they look alike."

Nick looked closely at the picture, and then he laughed at his wife. "You're a romancer," he said, "just a plain, bold weaver of fairy tales; they don't look any more alike than you and I do."

They spent several hours of the night in a study of the situation, and in the end they agreed with their first thought that they should write to the address left with them and let things take their natural course. They did not know what it meant, but they felt certain that it could do Mickey no harm and might do him some good, although Nick was convinced in his own mind that Lil alone could

in any way be associated with the complications in connection with the watch. Within a few days he had a chance to question Mickey about his parents.

"Do you remember anything about your father and mother, Mickey?" Nick asked, as they sat one evening at the rear of the store swapping tales of adventure.

"Things are all mussed up in my mind about them," Mickey admitted thoughtfully. "Buggy Sanders, you remember him?"

"No, I don't think I ever met him."

"He was bar keep at the 'Blue Bell' for some time, but when they sprung the trap here he was skinning the streets with an easy money man from 'Frisco. In the round up they got Buggy and I've never heard of him since; but he told me that my father and mother died when I was just a little boy. He said my father used to drive a hack, but I remember grandpa Peck all right. He was a good old man—and sometimes I think I can remember my mother, there was something kind of pretty and sweet smelling away back there where I can't see. It musses me all up. I wonder if Buggy is out yet. Some day I'm going to ask him more about my folks."

CHAPTER XIX.

Mickey was learning the lesson of patience. A reasonable assurance of what an effect was to be held him in willing waiting for it. He was so intensely worldly that this life was of vast importance to him. He was trying to make every hour of his time a brilliant one. He absorbed the good and lasting, and every intelligent person with whom he came in contact was an unknowing contributor to his self-imposed system of education. That which he had not learned from professional teachers he learned from non-professional practicers. He respected the good, looked with awe upon the great, and worshiped the beautiful. To him life was not a mockery, nor its warfare a thing to be made as simple as possible. He accepted the amassing duties as pleasure loads. He needed no longer to hear the cry, "work, work, work!" The word was engraved on his brain. Opposing habits were sacrificed that success might be more nearly assured and the passing pleasures of an hour were denied in the rapt anticipation of accomplishing a sempiternal something. With the passing of the weeks he grew in strength, though the knowledge of his real achievements reached him slowly. He found it necessary often to resort to his "soap graft" as he termed it. He canvassed the streets and made pictures for window attractions. Nick's store windows were filled with specimens of Mickey's work and many of the passing paused to glance at the curious art exhibit.

One afternoon, several weeks after Mickey had

returned, he was strolling down the street toward the residence, on the porch of which he and Piggy had, years before, spent a few miserably happy moments. As he passed the well kept dwelling an electric car drew up before it and he glanced up to see a girl step out and move up the walk. He was but a few feet from her; so close, in fact, that he paused while she passed before him. She gave him one sweeping, half perplexed glance. Had she not seen him somewhere? She looked back. He was walking as she had seen some one else walk—where? In a dream? He was handsome!

Mickey's love for the beautiful had inspired him to do the best he could with himself, and the result was better than he knew. Ever beneath his clean clothes and polished shoes he could see the dirt of long ago, and across his mind the knowledge of his complete transformation traveled slowly. His eye followed the girl as she swept before him up the walk and into the house. The light touch of her feet upon the walk, the rustle of her delicately perfumed clothing, the glance of her clear blue eyes and the graceful contour of her body; the remembrance of all these clung to him as he walked slowly on. His thoughts were in a medley, and his heart took on a feeling strangely antagonistic to its former bent.

It was a few evenings later that he was in the store in conversation with Nick, when the same girl came in. "Good evening, Nina," said Nick, and she replied, giving Mickey another of her half-curious glances. "You remember Nina Carmen, don't you, Mickey?" asked Nick.

Mickey was amazed at the change in Nina. She had grown almost into womanhood. Her dress was

nearly at full length, and she was not as he had known her, except that she was beautiful, even more so than she had been when he first knew her.

"Yes," he replied, "I remember Miss Carmen as a little girl, but I think she has forgotten me."

"No," said Nina, "I have not. It was you who was with the little cripple the day he got sick on the cigarette." Mickey flushed. Would she never forget about that! "And it was you who offered me your last bit of pie one morning when I came in here for some groceries," she continued, smiling. "But I would never have known you—you are so different."

"I have grown," commented Mickey. He did not know how much he had changed.

Nina made a few purchases and moved out with a pleasant "good evening," to both.

Thereafter, it seemed to Nick, Nina came oftener to his store, and frequently she and Mickey met. Nina's spirits bubbled always, and Mickey was amazed at her attitude toward him. Girls and women, beautiful girls and women, had always seemed to be creatures hopelessly removed from him. In the stern battle of his life he had seen and felt generally the harder side. His inspiration had come most largely from the artificial. Here in Nina he found frank, feminine nature. He walked with her to her home one day, carrying a few little packages for her, and the incident was an epoch in his life. Right by her side, in the public street, under the eyes of thousands he passed, hearing as the tinkle of distant music the sweet prattle of her voice. He feared to speak for the sound of his voice, he felt, would be a coarse, discordant tone.

A gentleman passing lifted his hat and smiled upon Nina and her escort.

"My uncle," commented Nina, and Mickey inwardly rejoiced that the man had let him pass on unmolested.

At the door of her home Nina took her packages with a hearty expression of her gratitude to Mickey for his kindness.

"You must come and see us some time, Mr. Peck," she said in parting. "I want you to meet mamma again. She's out calling today."

Mickey stammered an inconsequential reply as he turned away, and he drew a long breath of regretful relief as he found himself again free to think about it all, undisturbed. The perspiration broke out on his forehead; his face paled as he affirmed in his heart that he would make himself worthy of these heretofore unhoped-for blessings which now seemed vaguely possible. He glanced back toward Nina's home. Standing on the porch she waved him a smiling good-bye as a guilty flame rolled across Mickey's face.

This event was a new and wonderfully inspiring incident in Mickey's life. Out of it grew ambitions and determinations which stirred him to the very soul.

CHAPTER XX.

"It's Judge Brooks!"

"No, they wouldn't have the Judge's face posted up that way."

"Well, they have, just the same. Let's step in and see who does the work."

The speakers were two young men who had stopped and were looking through a store window at the sketched face of a man. The face shone with contentment. A satisfied smile hovered over the features and the whole took on an expression of ethereal enjoyment. The few words beautifully printed underneath explained it all: "This man smokes the 'Big Four' five-cent cigar, for sale inside."

The young men stepped in. "Give us a couple of 'Big Fours,'" said one, and then as he was puffing away for a light, he asked, "Who does the sketch work for you?"

"A boy over on Eleventh Street," explained the store keeper. "He calls around every few days and changes them. He's a good one."

"Yes, he is; that's a grand likeness of the Judge except, of course, the Judge don't at all times look quite so happy."

"Judge who?"

"Judge Brooks—that's the picture of Judge Brooks, didn't you know it?"

"No. I just supposed the pictures were the boys creation."

"It might just be an accidental likeness. Where can we see this young fellow?"

The address was given and the inquirers started for Nick's place of business. Arriving there they made inquiry for the author of the sketches and were informed that he was not in at that time, but would be in soon. While they were waiting the young gentlemen examined such work as was in the windows of the store and explained to Nick how they had happened to be attracted to the sketch in the cigar store window.

"I think," said Nick, "that every face he draws is the likeness of some one he has seen. He seems to want a base to work from."

"A mighty good thing that he can do it that way and do it so well," commented one of the visitors.

"Now here is a picture back here," said Nick, and he took the men to the rear, "that the boy won't deliver because he overdid the likeness." Nick held the picture up where they could see it distinctly. "This," he continued, "is a sketch of a little lake down the Langton line a hundred miles or so. Mickey was there a few years ago, and saw a very beautiful woman on the lake. He undertook to make a drawing, including the lady, and evidently got along nicely until he came to her, and then he was stuck until he conceived the idea of making a weak likeness of a girl that comes in here occasionally. He got it too strong, and now he keeps the picture in the dark. It was intended to be used as an advertisement for a summer resort.

"It's a mighty pretty sketch," the young men agreed.

Nick rolled the picture and returned it to its place just as Mickey came in.

"Here, Mickey," shouted Nick, and Mickey went back toward the trio. "A couple of young gentle-

men want to see you." Nick moved away. Mickey bowed and said:

"How are you, gentlemen?"

"My name is Carroll," said one, "and this is Mr. Richards. Judge Brooks, of the Central Court, set us out to run down the author of a set of sketches that have been circulated through the city showing the Judge as the exponent of the alleged virtues of a 'Big Four' cigar. The Judge doesn't smoke 'Big Fours,' and he feels that his reputation has been damaged about ten thousand dollars. We just thought maybe you would be interested a little in the Judge's attitude in this matter."

Mickey looked young Carroll straight in the eye for an instant, and then an amused little smile crept over his face as he said:

"If the old Judge can pick 'ten thousand' off of me, we'll just split it fifty-fifty, and save all further costs. I don't want to lose his face though, it's the best seller I have."

The young men laughed.

"We're on the *Herald*," Carroll admitted; "I do the Courts. Richards here has a circuit around among the theatres. Morgan, our managing editor, is a sort of an eccentric cuss in some ways, and one of his foibles is a constant hunt for new talent, young blood. You're a new one to us, so we want to try and sic you onto the old man. Have you ever done any newspaper work?"

"No, I've never tried. I've always been afraid that I couldn't get by with it yet. I'm in training though, and I'd be mighty glad to take it up."

"Well, Morgan will try you out all right. He'll try anything once. You just bunch up a few of the best of those sketches of yours and go up and

spread them out before him. Take the little sketch of the lake, the trees, and the rag baby with you. That's a mighty pretty thing. And don't forget to tell the Big Indian that Richards and Carroll steered you in. That's where we register, see?"

"Thank you, many times," said Mickey, with such an honest enthusiasm that the young men felt a happy glow of pleasure already in what they had done, and they bade him good-bye with repeated importunities for him to make the effort with Mr. Morgan.

The very next afternoon Mickey, with a bundle of his sketches in his hands, hung timorously about the big entrance to the *Herald* offices for a few seconds and then lunged fearlessly in. He asked for Mr. Morgan and was told to take the elevator to the sixth floor. There he landed to see but a few steps away the sign that indicated that he was at the threshold of Mr. Morgan's private office. He opened the door and stepped in to find himself greeted by another young man, who eyed him rather critically.

"Is Mr. Morgan in?" Mickey asked.

"He's about all in," the young man observed. "This is his busy day. Anything special? I'm his secretary."

"I'd like to see him a few moments. I'm an old acquaintance." The secretary looked rather skeptical. "And I was sent here by Carroll and Richards," Mickey added.

"Scouting again," commented the secretary. "Well, I'll see how things are. Got a card?"

"No, my name's Mickey Peck."

The secretary stepped into another room for a few moments and when he returned he said: "Go

on in there and sit down; Mr. Morgan will be ready for you in a minute or two. He gets a little hard of hearing if you talk very long."

"I'll not strain his ears any," Mickey commented with a grin which spread to the secretary's face. "I can tell the history of my life in about ten seconds."

When Mickey entered Mr. Morgan's innermost private office he found his erstwhile friend dictating a letter to a stenographer. He sat down and a few moments later noticed that the managing editor was ready to receive him. He stepped forward, an anxious expression on his face.

"I didn't quite get the name," said Mr. Morgan by way of opening the interview.

"Peck, Mickey Peck."

"Peck. It seems to me I've heard the name before," said Mr. Morgan, after a little pause. "Have you ever sent any work in here?"

"No, sir, but I used to know you several years ago. I blacked shoes on the Equitable corner and you used to patronize me."

Mr. Morgan allowed his eye to travel from the tip of Mickey's shoes to the top of his head. "Well, well! You and I took crushed strawberry cream together once, didn't we—just after you came out of the gambling joint."

"Yes, sir."

Morgan arose and shook hands heartily with Mickey. They talked for awhile over Mickey's experiences of the past and then the specimen sketches were spread out.

The result was pleasing enough to Mickey, though it brought to him the assurance from Mr. Morgan that he yet had much to learn. "There

is force in your work, Mickey," he said, "and you have but to work and you will be all right some day. We can use you here, if you want to work with us, and you will earn a small salary at first, and learn a great deal at the same time. This is memory work you have shown us—all of it, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, all except the drawing of the fire ruins. Would I have to work very fast here?"

"No, you must take your time with your work and aim to improve. You will be one of the *Herald's* special artists, and that must mean that you have the elements of a good one in you. It isn't what you are, but what you are to be. Industry will qualify you."

There was an old familiar sound in this sentiment and Mickey grinned his joy in hearing it again from Mr. Morgan.

The managing editor touched a bell and called a reporter to his desk. "Adams," he said, "this is M. Peck, joining our staff today. Take him out with you to the Johnson Steel and Iron Works tomorrow morning and have him make such sketches as the Company want to show in their contract for display space next week. There's no hurry—let the boy take his time. He can go back if he doesn't finish tomorrow.

The plunge into such work was rather sudden to Mickey, and he went with Mr. Adams the next morning to the Steel and Iron works with a quaking heart. Adams was through and gone long before Mickey was well under way with his work. In fact, he spent two solid days on the grounds, and then at the *Herald* office he worked until after midnight the second night perfecting his work. Even Mr. Morgan caught himself champing a little impa-

tiently over the time consumed by Mickey in this first effort.

As Mickey left his room, finally having finished his first assignment, a night editor was just passing the door. "Why!" he said, "you are keeping pretty late hours, aren't you?"

"Yes," replied Mickey, "this is my first dash at this kind of work, and I'm a little slow maybe."

"Oh, you're the new cub artist, eh? Let me look at your work."

Mickey turned back into the room and spread the sketches out on the table. "I hope it will suit," he said.

The editor whistled as he looked at Mickey's work, a clear, clean sketch of grounds and buildings. "Gad, you've got a conscience, all right," was his comment. I'll just take this in with me." They moved toward the editorial rooms. "You take a good sleep tonight, they won't need you before noon tomorrow. Come in and have a lunch with me."

Mickey had eaten no supper and the suggestion appealed to him. He was hungry, too; very hungry, only he had not known it while he was working. He munched savagely at the leg of a chicken and listened half breathlessly to a rumbling sound below.

"Going to press," said the editor, and the odor of printer's ink, the dim glare of lights through the dusty glass on partition doors, the masses of filed papers and odd-looking books piled around, combined to make Mickey feel as he had never felt before. He finished his lunch, thanked the donor, got the sketch of Lady's Lake from the roll of those submitted to Messrs. Morgan and Carroll, said

good-night to the night editor, and went down to the street.

A night car soon came along, and Mickey boarded it. He was the only passenger. "Boys will be boys," remarked the conductor with a smile as he rang up the fare.

Mickey laughed. "Yes, I might just as well have stayed all night," he admitted, as he leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes as if to sleep. The conductor called him at Eleventh Street. It was a long distance from the *Herald* office, and Mickey knew that in a day or two he must move farther into the city. It made him a little lonely to think of it. He would be so far from Mrs. Delaney and Nick, and their little girl. But then, there was Nina—he wouldn't have to dodge her any more. "I wonder," he thought, "I wonder if I could ever——"

He was at the door and soon after in his bed and sleeping, and in his sleep he dreamed that he was sent as the *Herald's* special artist to make a drawing of the moon. He rode in the tool chest of an engine tender while en route, and was roughly handled by the fireman, who tried to use him as a coal shovel. He finally arrived at the moon and was introduced to a man who looked a great deal like Mr. Morgan. "Did you bring a rope and a bucket?" asked the man of Mickey.

"No," replied he, "what do I need them for?"

"There is water in the moon, and you will need a rope and a bucket to draw the water," replied the man, with a loud laugh, and then Mickey knew it was a joke and he laughed, too, just to please the man, but in his heart he said: "this is another of them wise guys!" Then he looked and the man

was gone and he saw nothing but the great, big, round, fiery red moon, as large as the end of a street sprinkler tank, and he sat down to make his sketch. He used a boat oar for a pencil and his picture was to be drawn upon the floor of a dirty cellar. But the oar would not mark and great drops of sweat bubbled up over his face as he toiled in desperate futility. Suddenly he heard a merry laugh and glancing up saw a pretty face with a pair of bright blue eyes shining at him from around the corner of the moon. "Use the other end," said a sweet voice, and quick as a flash Mickey swung the oar around. As he did so a great stream of red fluid poured from the tip of the oar and began to spread about and over him. "Gosh," said Mickey, "this is goin' to be a big moon!"

me, too, these pretty girls ain't all lookin' for millionaires. I had a friend with a hundred dollar salary that won out against a fellow that was worth a half a million, and the stakes was a wise little maiden. They've been divorced since, but of course that ain't here nor there in this argument." Mickey laughed, so did Nick.

"Well, look at me then," continued Nick; "who'd of thought six years ago that I could catch a prize package like Minnie? I didn't hardly think so myself, but I fell into the race and stayed with it until I won. By the way, Nina thinks you're one of the smartest young men in the city.

"So much more the reason that I should keep out of her way. I don't want her to get next to how much I don't know."

"Don't you think for a little minute that these girls don't like a fellow that's long on knowledge of the world, even if he's a little short on rhetoric, civil government, and the defunct languages. Why, when I began work on Minnie there was a fellow courtin' her that could make the darndest longest talk on animal magnetism you ever heard, but he didn't have much of it on him and he couldn't dig up the price of an ice cream only about once every week, while I threw them into Minnie four strong every evening, with a box of bon-bons and a bunch of violets to boot. But, as I said before, Mickey, you're young yet, an' the world is big, an' there's lots and lots of pretty girls chucked back in corners in these cosy little homes."

Mickey started away, laughing at Nick's remarks.

"Oh, say, Mickey!" continued Nick, "how about that little ticker? Minnie's been wearing it so

long that she'll begin thinking it's hers if you don't take it away with you."

"Well, let her keep it, Nick, if she don't mind. Of course, she knows who sent it to me."

"Yes, that doesn't bother her any. We don't really know whose watch it was, anyway."

"Lil may have picked it off some easy mark who was sporting around with his wife's jewels," commented Mickey.

"If you ever want it, you'll know where to find it, Mickey," was Nick's parting word.

A few evenings later Nick was sitting at his desk writing when Nina Carmen came in. He went forward and delivered a small roll into her hands. "Mickey told me to give this to you, Nina," he said. "He has moved up into the city to work on the *Herald*. He has a good position."

Nina took the roll with a simple "thank you." The grocer's lad delivered into her hands the few articles she had purchased and she was gone. When she got to her home she hurried to her room and opened the roll. A little note dropped out. She picked it up and read:

"Dear Miss Carmen:

"I hope you won't be sore at me for making a picture of you by mistake. I was trying to make an advertising sketch for the Blake Company, and you insisted on getting in on the job. I'm sorry that I couldn't make you look as pretty on the spread as you have always looked to me. I'm going up town to work hard so that some day I'll be able to take a little course in 'how to behave in the presence of those whose friendship you aspire to retain;' then maybe some day I can see you again, without having a brain blow-out every time I try to speak.

Believe me, you have had me going some, and I'm trying to go in the right direction. I'd die this minute for you, if you needed my life—good-bye.

"M. Peck."

Nina re-read the letter, which thrilled her happily, although at the same time she felt a sense of great loss. She opened the sketch and looked at it closely. It was a piece of black and white work, and sure enough she was the central figure in a lovely scene. She was too central she thought. Her beauty had been over estimated. The little boat was tilted in the rippling water, just as Mickey had seen it the day he was at the park. The tree-lined, farther border of the lake loomed through the mist of distance and a spectral fowl swooped down to dip in the surface of the water. Nina sat on a camp stool, looking out across the ruffled field, her face turned so that the artist might with good effect impress the perfect outlines. A dainty foot and ankle peeped from the folds of her smoothly drawn shirt and a slender hand rested idly on the edge of the stool. At the nearer border line of the lake a few water plants bent with the mighty crush of the tiny waves and a soft turf, beautiful in its symmetry, stretched up to Nina's feet. For a long time she sat looking at the sketch. Many another she had seen, more beautiful to others, no doubt, but to her there was a glory in Mickey's little drawing that made captives of her eyes.

Nina was in her sixteenth year. She had lived in physical and mental pleasure almost all her life. The various happy experiences of childhood had come to her in the usual routine of juvenile history and, though she had had her petty annoyances, yet the older know that her years must have been

pleasure years, for the later years of one's life prove it so. So much greater are the troubles of after-life that we must needs look back upon the trivial disturbances of childhood as qualified ecstasies. Even as with the advance of age men are always experiencing a hotter day than ever before, a longer rain, a harder freeze, a more sweeping rise of the river, a more damaging frost, so, too, with the advance of time miseries become more penetrating, and one of them is the lagging arrival of the knowledge that early troubles were comparative joys.

In reality Nina's life had been a continuously happy one, and in that her experiences were not exclusive. There are, have been, and shall be many others. But with all her present pleasures there were other beauty fields to traverse. She was approaching the age when happiness is governed to a great extent by different causes and misery is made a thousand times more probable and powerful. She had cast her doll babies aside, and she said no longer to her visiting girl friend: "Let us 'play' that you are Mrs. Brown and I am Mrs. Smith; and let us 'play' that you come to see me; and let us 'play' that I say: 'How do you do, Mrs. Brown, how is your husband?' Now, 'play' that you say: 'I am well, Mrs. Smith, and so is my dear husband.'" and the little girl who is "playing" she is Mrs. Brown "plays" that she says even all that the little girl that "plays" she is Mrs. Smith has told her to "play" she should say. Yes, Nina had moved away from that age, but she had reached another and one in which she said in her heart, "I will 'play' that my hero came to me and whispered in my ears such words as had never been spoken to me before and I will 'play' that his life was mine

and my life was his and that we wandered side by side, hand in hand, out into the open, under clear, bright, happy, eternally smiling skies."

Ah, yes! She was still "playing," but those were dream "plays" such as all others have had and such as the older others know are a thousand times more often but mocking dreams.

Heroes are human and hero dreams are vapors that pass away before the strong sunlight of a revealed life. "Let us 'play'," says the fond mother over the cradle of her babe: "let us 'play,' my darling, that you grow up into a sterling manhood; and let us 'play' that the good revere you, the wise listen to you and the great seek you. Let us 'play' that the world has been bettered by you and that your mother has been blessed in your birth!" The years pass and the babe has become a man. He has not withstood the temptations of youth and the gathering years have failed to make him a true hero. There comes a time when he stands in disgrace; the world cries against him and the hand of the law hangs threateningly over his head. The aged mother clings to him, weeps over him, prays for him; and, in a moment, when the cruel present can be, for an instant, banished to the past, she "plays" he is a babe again. So Nina "played" in her heart and what wonder that Mickey Peck should sometimes figure in her dreams? He was handsome and a hero must be handsome. He was brave, she knew, for he was fighting the world single handed.

CHAPTER XXII.

Mickey soon found that his position on the *Herald* was not going to be a workless job. To his lot fell a great proportion of the drudgery of the department in which he was employed. Other artists, who had taken regular courses of training, and were better educated and more widely informed generally were naturally chosen to handle the more brilliant assignments. Mickey's progress was slow, for he was primarily deficient, and he had to build from the ground up. He realized his shortcomings, and knew, too, that he must work and work and work. There came discouraging days to him when he felt sick at heart, and weary; and again, under the encouragement of Mr. Morgan's word of praise he would be restored to his normal condition of hopefulness and go about his work happily.

He dropped down to the street from his work one afternoon over a year after he had taken up work on the *Herald,* and was leisurely walking along, when across the street almost within hailing distance, he saw the object of his many dreams, the first time he had seen her since he had moved up into the City. Nina and a girl friend chatting gaily were hurrying down the street. Nina did not see him, so Mickey did not hesitate to shadow the pair with reverent eyes for a little while. The fresh radiant beauty of the girl enslaved him all the more. In his thoughtless, all-else-forgetting pursuit of the girls with his eyes and feet he accidentally stumbled against a lumbering figure of a man picking his

way slowly along the walk. Mickey glanced at him curiously and then stopped stone still and looked the man square in the face. It was Buggy Sanders!

Buggy looked dully into the eyes of the young man and shambled on. Mickey tapped him on the shoulder.

"Aren't you Buggy Sanders?" he asked.

"An' w'at if I am! W'at's yer frame up?"

"Don't you remember me, Buggy? Mickey Peck! I used to see you over at Eleventh Street when the town was wide open!"

Buggy scanned the boy curiously for a few seconds while his dull intellect wrestled with its record of the past, but finally he brightened a bit.

"Mickey Peck!" he said, "the kid what biffed the mick on the turban fer slewin' the crip?"

"That's me, Buggy. I've been wanting to see you for a long time."

"Der was a long time while I was'n' on exybition," admitted Buggy, the shadow of a grin showing under the bristled growth on his dissipation twisted face.

"Yes, I know," said Mickey, "I'm glad you're out! I've been wanting to see you to ask about my father and mother—you knew them, didn't you? I——"

"Say, Mickey," interrupted Buggy, "could you spare me a nibble o' grub an' a bit o' likker to ooze it down?"

"Come in here," said Mickey, leading the way into a basement restaurant. "We'll get what you want here."

Buggy took his time to eat, his time to talk. Not until he had had his fill of beef and potatoes, with

several cups of strong coffee, would he deign to talk, and even then his most emphatic words were a bitter complaint because he had not been furnished with "likker."

"They don't serve it here," explained Mickey, and Buggy was for going elsewhere, but against that Mickey remained firm, and his threat to leave quieted the turbulent one somewhat.

"You did know my father and mother, didn't you Buggy?" Mickey asked again, after Buggy had been provided with a good strong cigar, and was laboriously puffing at it.

Buggy sat in heavy silence for several moments.

"Der wasn' no fadder, Mickey—just yer mudder, Lil—Lilian Evans."

From Mickey's lips there came not a sound, but his face turned an ashen gray and his heart seemed to cease to beat. An awful hopelessness brooded over him. "But perhaps there was a mistake," he thought, "maybe Buggy didn't understand." He listened further to the mumbling words.

"She was a gay gal, Mickey. I never seen her till de year dey hung Skinny Pike fer stickin' the preacher. She come to town, bringin' you wid her, an' we puts you in wid ole Peck, cause she was a littl' pertikler about yer raisin'. I ain't no reckerlection about any fadder at all, Mickey. It ain't likely ye had any reg'lar dad; but ye had a darn good mudder. Ye show it in yer slip-overs. Yer mudder always wore happy hangers."

Mickey felt that he would suffocate. He leaped to his feet and struggled for his breath. He felt an inclination to jump upon Buggy and trample him.

"Don' be'n a hurry, Mickey. It's comin' back to

me now. Y' know I hadn' tot about you fer so long. Bobby was yer name. Lil was proud o' you. You lived wit' ol' Peck till he croaked 'n then ye run wild."

"You lied to me," hissed Mickey, interrupting Buggy in such a way that even the dull intellect of the mental and moral sot flashed into momentary brilliance. "You lied to me! You told me that my father and mother were both dead, that my father drove a hack. Grandpa Peck was my father's father, you said. You lied to me. You made me think everything was regular. But I know, I know!" Mickey moaned hopelessly, sinking back into his chair, as there flashed into his memory the scene of the night when Lil had hugged him fiercely to her breast in her good-bye visit to him.

"Don' get excited, Mickey," Buggy said, fumbling for a defensive word, for his mind was clearing. "Lil was perticular—yes, I know it were a frame up! Der wasn' no fadder. I forgot, Mickey! I wasn' to tell, but it's been so long! Lil come bringin' y'u wid her an' y'u was jus' a littl' tike, Mickey, no bigger'n a kitten—an' we was goin, to pertect ye, so Lil said. She had noshuns, Mickey; an' I've tipped the game! I fergot! I warn't doin' ye no dirt an' I ain't sore on Lil. I was jus' mixt up. Maby dere's a mistake, Mickey. I don' know. Lil never tol' me. She an' you jus' come. Mabby yer dad was reg'lar! Them days, them days!" continued Buggy broodingly, "Never agin, never agin!" he mournfully added, shaking his head slowly from side to side.

Mickey looked at him with a sudden feeling of pity, and Buggy glancing up into Mickey's eyes

and scanning his smooth, clear face, had a memory flash of his own bright, promising youth of thirty years before. "Don' do it, Mickey—cut it all out —it don' pay! I'd give all de res' of me life fer jus' a week o' yourn! Cut it all out!"

Mickey understood, but he shivered as he rose from his seat to go. He glanced about guiltily anticipating the contemptuous gaze of any who might be near. He dropped a dollar on the table for Buggy, as he explained that he must hurry away.

"I'll see you again some time, Buggy," Mickey said.

"Don't fergit!" Buggy urged, and added: "an' it don' make no dif'rence 'bout yer fadder an' mudder, Mickey, it's all in yerself. Tanks fer de clinker, yer a good sport!" He was sinking back into his abnormal self again. "An' yer mudder, she were a thur'bred, too, Mickey. Der hain't never been nothin' like 'er on 'Leven street before ner after."

Mickey did not wait to hear Buggy's final comment. He rushed out into the street and dizzily contemplated the glare of the early evening lights. It seemed to him that he was looking out into a different world, an uglier world, a hopeless world. The thousands came and went, but Mickey lunged blindly about the streets, heedless of the human herd. He felt that he was in no way a part of the street gayety of the city night. He turned out into the less frequented darker street highways and walked and fought the greatest mental battle of his life. He slaughtered in an instant the romantic hope that had been such an inspiration to him since he had again met Nina Carmen. That done, he felt weak, and hopeless, and careless. At midnight he dropped into his work room at the

Herald office and listlessly glanced over a few half finished sketches which lay upon the table. He felt as if he never cared again to touch a brush or pencil, and yet he did. He sat down and dreamily drew a picture of a girl, a beautiful girl, standing out as the one clear bright human light amidst a great crush of humanity moving along a busy city street. All others were dim, indefinite figures, but she was the essence of beautiful, sweet, modest, lovable femininity. In his work he forgot all else, but after it was done there came back to him suddenly the memory of the revelations of the evening. It came with crushing force, and he buried his face in his arms on the table and sobbed himself to sleep.

Morning found Mickey tired and weary, but a sudden important assignment, brooking no delay, threw him again unwillingly into the active work on the great newspaper. A fire, a murder, the collapse of a building, one followed the other so quickly that Mickey did not have time to brood over his great trouble. Strange, too, it seemed to him that no one treated him differently; but "they don't know; they don't know," he cried to himself, "and I do."

He entered the managing editor's room one evening, and asked for a lay-off

"Tired of us, Mickey," Mr. Morgan asked.

"No, not tired, Mr. Morgan," Mickey explained, "but I want a change, I want to go somewhere else for a while."

"Oh, what a boy!" Mr. Morgan said, laughing. "It's in your blood, isn't it? Restless as a caged lion; must get out and range, once in a while. Well, you can go, but I'm going to handle you this

time. You're not going to run wild. I will not stand for that. You're going East."

"Anywhere," consented Mickey, wearily.

"Are you pretty tired, boy?" Mr. Morgan asked, a touch of tenderness in his voice; "you've been working faithfully. Adams tells me you're making good, and better, right along."

"I'm glad to know that," said Mickey, with a feeble smile, "sometimes it has seemed to me that I'm not hitting it up right."

"Oh, you've done splendidly—you mustn't get discouraged."

"Have you got a place in the East for me?"

"Yes, I can work you in, I'm sure. Have you any relatives in the East?"

"No, not that I know of, Mr. Morgan. I don't know anything about my folks. Does it make much difference about one's folks, do you think?"

"No, not much. Of course we all pride ourselves more or less in our ancestry, if we have any worth while, but I always liked Voltaire's comment: 'A gentleman needs no grandfather.' After all, though, I think as a general thing, our folks were about what we are."

Mickey shook his head. "Can I leave right away, Mr. Morgan?"

Mr. Morgan realized that something bore rather heavily upon Mickey's mind, and his knowledge of the nature of young men prompted the sympathy which he felt for Mickey. Perhaps it was a love affair—a hopeless affection fanned into virulency by proximity. He knew very well that distance was a popular cure. Change of scenery is a wonderful antidote to misplaced affections. He looked rather sharply at Mickey. He was tempted to ask

him to confide in him, but he didn't. He thought that it would no doubt be best for Mickey to experience the change that he craved.

"I will have it all arranged in a couple of days, Mickey," was Mr. Morgan's answer.

The next day Mickey went out to see Nick Delaney and family and bid them good-bye. He had not been a frequent visitor at the Delaney home of late, but the strong bond of friendship had been impaired none. Mr. and Mrs. Delaney and their daughter claimed him as their own, and they were grieved when they learned that he was expecting to leave the city. As he was about to go Mickey asked for the little watch.

"I don't like to take it if it's useful to you, Mrs. Delaney," Mickey apologized.

"It's yours, and you should have it," insisted Mrs. Delaney.

"It seems to mean a little something to me," said Mickey, cautiously, "something more than just a watch."

"Yes," said Mrs. Delaney understandingly; "no difference who it is, if they like us, and show it, we can't help but sort of appreciate it. The—the lady that left this watch for you must have liked you Mickey. There must have been some good in her. She must have been hungry for a child's love."

She handed the watch to Mickey. He took it in his hands with a chaos of mental sensations. Mrs. Delaney eyed him curiously. "The picture of the little girl always interested me," she commented.

"What little girl?" Mickey asked.

"The picture in the inside case. Didn't you ever see it?"

Mrs. Delaney took the watch in her hands again

and opened the case, revealing the picture to Mickey. Mickey looked at it with quickened interest.

"I didn't know that was in the watch," he said in surprise. "I wonder who she is?"

"You must let us know where you are while you're away this time. You know something might come up," Mrs. Delaney suggested.

"I'm not going to hide. I want to hear from you, too."

The picture of the little girl in the watch was strangely fascinating to Mickey. The mystery of it all excited his imaginations. "Who could she be? Where did the watch come from? Did Lil come by it honestly?" he would ask himself. "If so, who was the little girl?" She had a sweet face and her picture always with him became an inspiring presence to Mickey. She, he believed, cared nothing about who his mother and father were. She was his willing, faithful, unquestioning, happy companion. She never bothered her head about family trees or skeletons, or ancestry, or pasts, or futures. Always she stayed with Mickey, smiling, and happy, and perfectly contented. She helped Mickey face the world again, bravely reconciling himself to the new conditions, putting aside again and again the insolent, furtive hope that some day he might—some day he might go back to—No! She would not permit that—this little tyrant who lived in Mickey's watch. She was a jealous little witch, and Mickey loved her madly, but always, always he remembered the other, the sweet little really-living girl with the blue socks, and the pure white hands and the gently flaming cheeks. She, too, had never hesitated when the opportunity of-

fered to be his willing companion, but she didn't know! He shuddered as he remembered the scene in the dully lit basement restaurant in Mammothville, over against him the heavy, beard bristling, crooked face of Buggy Sanders. It was like a hideous dream, only it was worse than a dream—it was real, and the world was changed to Mickey.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Into his work in the great City of the East, Mickey entered with hesitating, uncertain, yet positive steps. Each new, important, fateful adventure bore upon him seriously. He was ever like the orator whose heart is in his throat until he is on his feet and facing his audience; then comes assurance and eloquence. In the immediate presence of an emergency Mickey rose grandly; in its anticipation he was sometimes a trifle timid.

He had been at work but a few weeks on a big paper in this city when it was discovered by an alert editor that Mickey had a special aptitude for a certain kind of illustration work. In depicting life on the great East side he was unusually effective. He seemed to drink in, sympathetically, the spirit of the masses of that part of the city, and he was chosen regularly to illustrate the work of those writers whose assignments were in the East side quarters. There was about his personality, too, something that won him friends in his new field. He was different, entirely different. He came to them as one who claimed nothing for himself but strove for all that he could get that was worth while. The new and wonderful scenes, with all their varying and splendid opportunities gave to Mickey that diversion which he so much needed, and in the contemplation of life's vicissitudes as they were revealed to him in the lives of others with whom he came in daily contact, he became more and more reconciled to his own uncertain niche in the world. As an atomic part of a great mass of mil-

lions of people, he felt secure; he lost the sense of shame that had at first oppressed him when he heard Buggy Sanders' story and later he learned to rise above it all, even in his own estimation, and bid the world to take him for what he was worth; only, at times there came over him such a loneliness—hopeless, unpromising! There was no relief from it excepting work, work, work! And work was to him as it is to all, an unfailing multiplying blessing.

He was busy one day in his department of the *Times* Building, applying himself in a deeply serious manner to the task of correctly illustrating a series of articles by one of the bright young writers of the paper. The writer, himself, was with Mickey, and together they were discussing some of the details of the study. They became thoroughly absorbed in their conference, heeding the coming and going of no one; yet there came an instant in their conversation when Mickey looked up nervously, vaguely conscious that he was under the critical scrutiny of some one, some one terribly in earnest, it seemed. His eyes caught first the gaze of a young woman, fashionably and beautifully dressed, and then he but dimly saw and heard the startled, almost piercing cry, "Bobby," and another woman, staggered, and fell toward him.

He leaped from his chair and caught the fainting form in his arms. As his face pressed closely to the clothing of the lady he had a strange sensation. It seemed that somewhere, sometime, he had felt the same form, had breathed in the same sweet odors. He carried the unconscious woman to an adjoining room and laid her on a divan, his mind in a medley of excitement as he nervously explained the situation to inquiring observers.

A brown-faced man gave quick orders for the care of the woman. A couple of girl stenographers executed the orders quickly and effectively. Mickey looked about helplessly. The young woman was standing near him, her face strangely white. She eyed him, queerly, Mickey thought. She had a sweet face, but so pale. She stepped to him as he was about to turn away.

"Please, you must not go," she said, and with her words came a clearing of her countenance; "my mother thinks you are her son, my brother."

"Oh," said Mickey, with a tone of consoling sympathy in his voice, "how sorry I am that I will not be able to comfort her! But, but, wasn't it 'Bobby' that she cried? That's strange!"

"Are you Bobby?"

"No; but once I heard that before——"

The girl stepped again to her mother's side to anxiously inquire as to her condition. She was recovering quickly, and returning again to Mickey the young woman pressed close up to him and her eyes looked up into his with a strangely familiar, filmy glitter.

"You look very like my brother Jimmy, in college now, only he's not quite so, so"—she blushed a trifle; "anyway," she continued, "I hope you are my brother."

In his heart Mickey echoed the mad hope, and then he was grabbed by the brown faced man who dragged him to the divan where the lady had regained consciousness.

She reached her hand out to Mickey, who extended his, and allowed himself to be drawn into her arms. He was smothered almost with hysterical kisses. The daughter, too, flung her arms

about Mickey, and he felt himself the hopeless, helpless center of an inexplicably affectionate demonstration. It bewildered him. He was as one dazed. He felt the shame of the deception and yet for one wild instant he gave himself over to the ecstasy of the belief that it all was true, and then he gently pushed the warm, tender arms aside as he said:

"There is some mistake. I am not the person you want. Don't blame me, please. It all came so suddenly. I couldn't stop you."

"There is positively no mistake, young man," said the brown-faced man, speaking for the first time to Mickey, "you are this woman's son, this young woman's brother, you were stolen from her when you were a babe by an adventuress, one who later went under the name of Lilian Evans. She died without telling you the truth about your birth. A little watch you had has inside the case a picture of this young woman when she was a little girl."

Mickey lifted the watch from his pocket. The woman held him close in her arms. He opened the inner case and looked at the picture of the little girl, and then up into the happy tearful face of the young woman.

"It is I," she said, "my precious brother, we all have a world of love for you."

She pressed her soft cheek to his while the mother clung to him in an almost pathetic manner. Mickey felt a sudden overpowering sense of unworthiness of such attentions. He had a flitting vision of himself as he was as a boy; as he was as he struggled through dirt and deprivations toward the uncertain goal of his ambitions. Again he gently pushed the women away from him.

"I can't understand it," he said; "I'm unworthy, too. I used to black boots on the streets of Mammothville. I lived in dens, and cellars, in shady streets. Some of my boy friends went to prison and others died young, because they lived fast lives. I've never had friends and associates like you—only, only just one. But, Buggy Sanders lied to me! He told me Lil was my mother. Oh, I can go back now, can't I?"

"No, not now, my big brother. You must come to your home, to our home, to your father and other sisters."

"And, have I a father, and other sisters too?" asked the bewildered Mickey.

"Dad and Jimmy and Clara, Edith and May, and mamma and me. Oh, what a surprise we have for them this evening. And what a handsome brother you are!" said the excited sister clinging close to him. "You see, you're the big brother of the family, only you are younger than Clara and I."

Mickey was led away, the mother and daughter hanging to his arms, the brown-faced man leading on. A great car waited below, and in the deep soft seats still pressed closely on each side by the hysterically happy women, they were whirled through crowded streets out into a smooth boulevard and on mile after mile until they came into a richly lawned, suburban district. Up one of the driveways the car turned, into a yard, in the deeply foliaged part of which there stood such a mansion as had often held the wildly speculative gaze of Mickey when he had by fortunate chance been permitted to visit the residence portions of the great cities in which he had sojourned.

The mother and daughter still preceded by the

brown-faced man led the bewildered Mickey through beflowered paths up wide stone steps into the palatial house, and Mickey stepped timidly upon the great soft rug on the floor of the dazzlingly pretentious room into which he was led. He heard merry voices, the twang of a piano and then, before he knew it, there came the sound of scurrying footsteps and he was soon in the presence of two other sweet faced girls, who looked in wonder at the brown-faced man, their mother, their big sister, and the half shrinking, bewildered young man, with a daub of paint on his face.

"This is your brother," the brown-faced man said, breaking the momentary silence that came with the sudden tensity of the situation. Again Mickey felt the warm arms of the joyfully weeping mother about his neck. The two new sisters came forward in a hesitating embarrassment. To them he was as a happily welcome stranger, but not a stranger for long. Mickey soon found himself the hopelessly bewildered center of the enlarged feminine group; and a little while later came another dainty little sister who climbed on his knees and patted his cheeks and felt in his pockets and pulled his ears and chattered incessantly. And still later came a gray haired, middle aged man, who was all unprepared for the great surprise in store for him, but the same dignity of control held him now that had held him through all the long years of search and grief. The strong arms of the father held Mickey closely for a few moments, and tears glistened in eyes that rarely showed a sign of such emotion.

Away along in the night, as Mickey tossed sleeplessly in a great bed in such a sleeping room as he had never seen before, he heard a soft confusion

below, and like a gently insinuating breeze it seemed to come near on tip-toe, on many tip-toes.

"In here, Jimmy," he heard in a repressed whisper, "our dear, new brother, fine and strong, and handsome."

It was the voice of Mamie, that enslaving oldest sister. The door softly opened. Dimly through the darkness Mickey could see the white forms of all his sisters, his mother too. There was a "hush," a click, and the room was softly lighted. Mickey closed his eyes and felt the excited, approaching presence of the little group, and then ashamed of any possible show of deception he opened his eyes and sat up in his bed as two sinuous, gauzily clad sisters flung their arms around him.

"I couldn't sleep," he stammered, "it's all so strange."

"No one can sleep—all the world is awake and happy," said Mamie, her eyes sparkling through the spreading dew, "and this is your brother, our brother, Jimmy," she added as the slender young man stepped forward and extended his hand.

Mickey grasped it awkwardly. "I'm afraid I've taken your room. I don't want to disturb you," he said, in the absence of any other thing to say; and, in truth, a faint fear that he might appear to this young man as an interloper flashed through his mind.

"Don't you think of that," responded Jimmy heartily, "we'll just bunk together, if you don't mind. You girls clear out of here now; I'm deucedly tired and so's brother Bob, no doubt.

But the girls were not to be driven out peremptorily. Again, in a repetition of the ceremonies of the earlier night, Mickey received sweet, lingering

good-night embraces from all the sisters and his mother; and Jimmy, too, endured in a nonchalant way the same evidences of affection.

The boys visited awhile, Jimmy prying into the story of Mickey's experiences with an excited interest, but finally, succumbing to the fatigues of the hour, he dropped asleep. He was awakened in a short while by Mickey, who apologized for disturbing his brother, as he said:

"Jimmy, there don't seem to be any one up; it's awfully quiet about the house and I'll have to get down to work a little early. I've got an assignment over on the East side today with one of our feature writers and the old man wants it played up strong for the Sunday rag. I'll just slip out without disturbing anyone else. I thought maybe they might be expecting me for breakfast."

"Say, you'll take me over to the East side with you on one of those jaunts some day, won't you?"

"I sure will, if you want to go. Do I get a 'sub' out here somewhere?"

"You'll have to take a surface to Elm Street and the second story line on in. Take an Express."

CHAPTER XXIV.

When Mickey rushed in to go to work that morning, he innocently created about as much of a sensation as he had been the cause of the day before. He had had a little trouble getting down town, trains were delayed and he really hadn't started quite soon enough to make the long distance from the home of his parents to town. And he was not expected.

"His story" was the great spread of the morning edition and no one of the managing force of the paper expected to see him back to work. But there he was, nervously anxious to fill his appointment, apparently expecting to continue his work on the paper just as if his living still depended upon his work. Indeed, Mickey had not paused to think differently, and soon he was en route on his mission of the day accompanied by the feature writer.

On the crowded car as they were whirled toward the duties of the day, Mickey had time to read the story of "his life" as revealed by the heavily headlined article on the front page of the *Times*. He learned that he was "Robert Allen Bruington, Jr.," son of Robert A. Bruington, President of the "Hammerscott Manufacturing Co.," the "Jersey City Bond and Investment Co."; and director in a number of institutions whose names meant nothing but "magnitude" to Mickey. Mickey learned from this wonderful story that he had been stolen as a baby from his home by the wife of his father's brother, an adventuress, who had married by intrigue and then in a mad and unrequited infatuation

for "Mickey's" father had stolen the little baby boy and fled the City. It was presumed that she was the victim of jealous hallucinations; that she had not been her normal self when she wrought such sad havoc in a happy home. What Lil's plans were, what her real object could have been, no one knew. It was only a surmise, that bitter hatred, and jealousy and soul-deep, heart disappointment had driven her half mad, and in the tragic contemplation of her own unhappiness she had sought to spread it among those who were the innocent cause of her misery. And then, there was still another surmise; a surmise that may have struck deeper toward the truth, perhaps. Lil had never been a mother and suddenly into her heart came the wild nature cry for baby love. Little Bobby, fresh and sweet and innocently appealing had clamped her bleeding heart in his chubby little hands. Him she could have. She would carry away with her the flesh and blood of him whom she had loved and lost. And she did. She lifted the little four-year-old Bobby from his bed as he slept, and in a few moments the miles were multiplying between him and his home. Clear across the middle states they went and finally into a great city of the West; and Lil had put far behind her the scenes of her tragic, misplaced love, and she had brought with her one little bundle of sweet life as her small portion of the old existence. Around the little boy's neck was hung his mother's watch, the quaint little time piece, with the "A" in bright red stones. Lil hid it away carefully lest it be her undoing and she plunged deeply into the wild mad life of the underworld, redeeming herself only by a frequently expressed devotion to the little boy, whom she

always loved. But it was evident that she never entirely forgot the disappointment of her unrequited affection, and she gloried often in the thought that she had been able to make others feel the keenness of heart suffering that she had felt.

The story filled Mickey with a thousand surging emotions. The wonder of it all! It seemed indeed but a story; and it was difficult for him to make himself a part of it, so clearly defined had been his own life experience and so far removed from any hint of what it might have been. He was so touched by the sentiment of the tale, the "sob-stuff" effect of the writer, that he paid little attention to the account of his eventual discovery, which briefly told, was as follows:

Mr. Bruington had employed all possible means to discover the whereabouts of Lil and his little son for months after their disappearance, and the efforts failed. He finally turned the case over to one world-famous group of detectives, and one of the most successful of their sleuths was assigned to the job. This man, finally effected the discovery of the son Bobby, but not until the father had long given up all hopes. So many clews had failed to materialize into anything promising that Mr. Bruington had at times become impatient; and had even unintentionally handicapped the work of the detective. The eventual discovery of the watch quickened hope for a time, but that was succeeded by a still greater gloom, when it was positively known that Lil was dead, and that a certain boy in whom she had shown some interest had completely disappeared. Years failing to show his presence in the old familiar haunts, the detective took a case that carried him into Europe and on over into

Southern Africa. A letter written by Nick Delaney advising him of Mickey's return to Mammothville trickled around through myriad obscure channels, across wide seas, into strange, slowly moving cities and back again to America before it reached the detective's hands; and then, uncertain, barely daring to hope that his clew was one that was entitled to any consideration, he said nothing to Mr. Bruington, or his family, and went on into the West to look at the case again first hand himself, before he aroused any hopes in the hearts of the family. There, browned, and showing the effects of his long months of foreign travel, he appeared again before Nick and his wife, only to learn that Mickey was now in the East. But, the perspective brightened a little, when he learned that Mickey was in the city which was the home of his clients, and from Mr. Morgan at the *Herald* office he was able to get Mickey's business location in the East. Then, back across the country he rushed and in an excess of caution this time he went only to Mrs. Bruington and the eldest daughter, imparting to them in a very conservative way the information that he had an uncertain clew which he wished them to join him in investigation; and then he led them to the *Times* building, and into Mickey's studio. He pointed out no one to his lady companions, but the eyes of the mother fell quickly upon him for whose renewed presence she had prayed for years, and she shrieked his name in an ecstasy of joy as she fell toward him. And then—the car stopped—

"We're here," Mickey's companion observed, and Mickey, somewhat dazed, rose and followed the special writer out of the car. A few moments

served to restore the bewildered boy to his usual condition of active interest in the work of the hour. He tore himself away from the strange story which he had just been reading.

"Let's see," his companion inquired, "did Jones put you next to your part in this little expedition?"

"Yes," Mickey responded, "I've got the credentials that'll get me in all right. Jimmy Billings will be out and take a few snaps of the outside of the shell and I'm to get the inside picture dope. Rotten fire protection!" Mickey continued, as his eyes swept over the dully colored, age-worn, six story frame structure; "fifteen hundred girls working on three floors; bad machines, poor power attachments, air so thick you can cut it up in slices. Well, here goes 'little Willie Bates, one of the soft snap attachees of the factory inspection department of our municipal organization'. If my talk don't get me by, watch for me when they dump me off the top. And don't wait for me," Mickey added as he started for the employees' entrance, upon the door of which a big sign gave out the information that none but employees were admitted; "I'll go through the thing from cellar to garret if they let me."

Mickey's credentials got him into the factory all right and a thorough knowledge of the vulnerable points in the mental makeup of the foreman and his assistants made it possible for him to soon gain all the freedom he needed for his alleged inspection.

The factory was one of the many in the city which was disregarding the laws effecting the provisions for the safety of employees. It was disregarding them so entirely that there were hardly any of the common safety appliances to be seen anywhere. The air was close and thick; the noise

deafening in certain departments and the floors were so crowded that one must be very careful in moving about lest they brush against other human beings or come in contact with parts of moving machines. The sudden turn in Mickey's personal affairs no doubt made him more impressionable at this time. He felt a great swell of pity in his heart for such workers. He stood for a little while imaging in his mind the features of a girl worker, her machine, the numberless over-hanging pulleys, the belts, the levers, the pedals. He noted the tired, but determined, heroic, noble expression on the girl's face. She looked as if she carried the weight of a world of responsibility, but she was withal rather buxom, alert, more capable and more healthy looking than many of the others about her, but her face reflected something strikingly tragic. The hair of all the girls was held close under tightly tied caps, their skirts were short and closely fitting. Mickey stepped close to this girl.

"Dangerous!" he observed in a tone loud enough for her alone to hear. She dared not turn her eyes from her work at that moment, but she hoarsely hissed back to him:

"Caught Meg Spaulding and tore the scalp off her head; killed Sissie Buxton in April when shaft broke; broke both legs and one arm for Mabel Adams a week ago when skirt caught in wheel, beat her all up."

Mickey backed away. He had his pictures in his mind now. He wanted nothing more. Yes, he must verify some part at least of the girl's brief statement. He stepped near to her again.

"Where does Mabel Adams live?" he asked. The girl could risk a moment now to look into Mickey's

eyes. He stood the test. He seemed to know her language.

"211 Polk."

"Thanks," Mickey responded, as he hurried away.

It was evening when Mickey dodged up from the subway and hastened toward the *Times* Building.

"Oh, there he is. Come here, Bobby!" were the happy sounds from girl voices that he heard as he drew near the entrance to the big building, and there in the great car were his four sisters and his mother, a world of love shining out of their eyes for him. It was another quick mental change for him. A change from a serious, deeply stirring study of factory girls working under the hardest possible conditons to the contemplation of beautiful feminine beauty and wealth and happiness and love extending its arms to him. He had entirely forgotten himself and his, but his eyes shone back the love so freely proffered him. He stood on the foot-board of the car and grasped the warm hands and thrilled under the touch of Mamie's fingers on his forehead when she lifted his cap and brushed back his hair.

"You've been working hard, Bobby," she tenderly murmured, "come on home with us now."

"I've some work to do that seems very important to me," explained Mickey. "I must do it now while it's clear. I couldn't take a camera with me."

"Take it home with you," suggested Mamie. "We'll give you a room all to yourself, and leave you all alone. It'll be nice just to know that you are there, with us."

"And you won't mind at all if I lock myself in and stay and stay and stay until I'm done."

"Not at all," insisted the mother and girls, "only," added little May, "you must leave the key hole open."

Mickey reported to his superior in the *Times* office, secured his working materials and joined the family group on their homeward trip.

At home, true to the promise made him by his sisters, although they mentally protested the isolation, he was allowed to shut himself up to his work, into which he entered with an interest which was all absorbing. Away along in the evening he heard a gentle tap at his door, and then the scurrying of footsteps. He stepped to the door and there on a chair was a dainty platter of substantial edibles. At the door of a distant room he saw the smiling face of Bessie, anxiously awaiting his verdict.

"You're too good to me," he called to the girl. "Thank you, I was hungry, but I had forgotten about it."

It was well past midnight when he finished his work, but he got a few hours' refreshing sleep, and since he had no assignment for the morning he did not have to hurry down town. He had breakfast with the family, a somewhat embarrassing event for Mickey, but it need not have been so, for he was under the scrutiny at all times of eyes of love, and they saw nothing but perfect table decorum in his manners. If he was awkward it was a sort of graceful awkwardness which pleased all.

The younger girls must prepare for their day's duties in school and at music. Mamie begged Mickey to let her see his work and he led her to the room in which he had labored so long and so intently the night before.

"These are not beautiful pictures," Mickey ex-

plained to his sister before he showed them to her. "They are just illustrations to vivify the story that is to be used in connection with them in our Sunday paper. I am trying to show in pictures, how bad conditions are in a big East side factory." He lifted a sheet of paper and showed to his sister the drawing of a girl as she sat at her machine, incessantly watching the swiftly moving shafts and deftly shifting her burden of heavy cloth. Above was the great mass of pulleys, the ragged ends of beams and ropes, and all around were other workers, their faces showing the strain under which they were laboring.

So realistic was it all that Mamie, a stranger entirely to all such scenes, seemed to mentally grasp the thought of how barren, how monotonous, how soul-crushing must be such labor, and on the girl worker's face Mickey had succeeded in depicting the things which he had seen there, the haunting expression of awful responsibility.

"The terrible thing here," Mickey explained, "is not that these girls have to work, but the conditions under which they work. Here," he added further, as he revealed another picture—"I saw this girl, too. She is in bed now with two broken legs and a broken arm, and a body bruised from feet to scalp. And here," Mickey continued as he revealed another picture, "is the way it was done."

This picture showed the form of a girl being twisted and thrown about when her clothes became entangled in a wheel which had not been properly safeguarded. The face of the girl sent out a wild, mad cry for help, for pity.

"And you saw her?" Mamie asked, her eyes reflecting a deep, sincere pity.

"Yes, I saw her, and talked to her, and she told me all about it, only she begged me to protect her so that she will not lose her job, and will be permitted to go back to work when she gets well. She'll never be able to work there again though, and we've got to make this public for the good of other workers."

Mickey showed his sister his picture of the girl whose scalp was torn off, too, and the other sketches which he had made.

Mamie turned away from them with a shudder, "I didn't know such conditions exist," she commented. "What a weight of guilt must rest upon the shoulders of those who are responsible for such things."

Sunday morning the great edition of the *Times* was carried by Mamie Bruington to her father, and she showed him with delight the big double page sensational article, the striking illustrations of which had been drawn by Bobby.

"Bobby saw that poor girl and talked to her," Mamie explained to her father, as she pointed out the picture of the girl being whipped about when her dress caught in the fly wheel, "and another girl told him about this girl whose scalp was torn off. Isn't it awful?"

Mr. Bruington paled a little as his eyes fell upon the triple-column picture of the exterior of the building. There was something very familiar to him about the appearance of the structure; and, yes, as he glanced at the smaller headlines he caught the name of the institution. "Factory No. 8, Esteybar-Burns Co., corner 189th and Atlanta Avenue."

"I want to read the article clear through, Mamie,"

Mr. Bruington explained, and with a parting injunction that he save the paper for her so she could show Bobby's pictures "to mamma," Mamie turned away. Mr. Bruington read the article very carefully, for he was a large stockholder and director in the Esteybar-Burns Co. factories. Just the week before, at a meeting of the directors in the downtown office, the matter of the girl, Sissie Buxton, had been up, and the manager of Factory No. 8 had stated that he felt sure that they would be able to show that the girl had been glaringly negligent, and that her death was the result of gross carelessness in her part. Their attorney had passed the matter over lightly, assuring the directors that he would be able to make a case that need cause them no concern. Mr. Bruington had felt that the attorney, who was very influential with the officials of the City Government, was quite sure of his case.

The minor accidents had never reached the dignity of presentation to the board of directors.

Mr. Bruington read the article twice, very carefully, and then he carried the paper back to Mamie and inquired if Bobby was in, only to learn that he and Jimmie, who had run home for Sunday, were away for the day, having taken Bessie and May with them.

The next morning, Mickey was surprised to find his father awaiting him in the big car, when he was ready to start for work. "I made arrangements with your managing editor yesterday for you to make a little trip with me today," the father explained.

"There wasn't anything billed for me this morning, anyway," Mickey observed, "I called them up last night."

"I read the article about Factory No. 8 yesterday in the *Times*. I had never seen any of your pictures before. They were very graphic. Mostly imagination."

"No, only one was faked up—the picture of the girl who lost her scalp. The rest of them were the real thing. That's an awful muss up there. A fire panic would murder hundreds of the girls, to say nothing of the men on two floors. I'm glad the *Times* is going into this fight. I'll do all I can. When a fellow wakes up to find himself a welcome fixture in such a home as I have now, with father and mother and sisters and brother, the best in the world, he feels like helping some of those who haven't been so lucky."

"Sometime when we're not so busy, you must just settle down and tell us all about your life."

"Yes, I know what it is to be hungry and cold, but I've never been up against it the way the workers are in some of these death traps in these big cities. This city is no exception. They're all the same way. Life is hell for a good big percentage of the population."

"What's the cause?"

"Mr. Morgan, managing editor of the Mammothville *Herald,* used to tell me that there are just two causes: the greedy man and the parent who has passed his sins down to the succeeding generations. He says there are some people born into the world who can never rise above a low level. I guess it's true. Right up in that factory No. 8 there are hundreds of workers who will not permit their conditions to change much for the better. They don't know and don't believe in anything better. All the *Times* can do for them is to

insist that they be surrounded by the ordinary safeguards."

"We are going over to the factory this morning, I want you to show me through. I know the manager."

"He may not have a very warm feeling for a *Times* representative this morning, but I guess they don't know me."

The doors to the factory opened surprisingly easy to Mr. Bruington, Mickey thought, but he asked no questions. Mr. Bruington asked to be taken to the particular part of the building where Mickey got his ideas for the sketches, and Mickey led him over into the employees' departments, and to the floor on which he had made his study. Mickey again wandered down among the crowded workers, Mr. Bruington holding back a little, rather appalled by the great confusion, the unfit atmosphere, and the crowded conditions on the floor. There was a sudden hubbub. A girl shut off her machine and leaped at Mickey. "Here he is," she cried. "This is the fellow that give us the blow down, girls."

The girl saw her mistake and quickly sprang back to her work, but she did so in a somewhat frenzied hurry, since she saw the eyes of the boss upon her, and her skirt caught on a slowly turning piece of machinery. Her body was drawn toward the floor where mutilation awaited her. Mickey comprehended the situation and leaped to the girl, grabbed her around the body and with a supreme effort tore from her the portion of the skirt gripped by the machine. The girl flashed him a look of appreciation, mingled with hatred, and turned again to her work. This was the girl with whom Mickey

had talked on his former visit to the factory, and it was her striking face which he had reproduced so effectively in one of his sketches. The accident and the attending incidents occasioned so much confusion that the mechanic in charge of the machinery on that floor shut off the power and all the machines stopped. The floor boss and Mr. Bruington pressed down toward Mickey and the girl.

"What's the trouble?" the boss asked angrily of the girl. "Don't you know enough to tend to your business and let visitors alone."

"Well, he's the smart yap that blew me down in the *Times* yesterday and the 'tiger' is checkin' me out this evening."

"Has he discharged you?" Mickey asked.

"Yes, he landed on me a-plenty this morning. He says I squealed to you about Mab Adams. It wasn't me, was it? I got two little sisters an' my mother. I must have work. Now, it wasn't me, was it, sir? You know I didn' do no talkin'. An' my picture, too; I didn' give you no picture. See if you can't square it with the 'tiger', please," the girl appealed in tense earnestness. "There ain't nothing else for me to do, an' Sissie an' Mamie, they're so little yet, an' mother's sick and awfully weak."

"Who's the 'tiger'," Mr. Bruington asked of the floor boss, and added something in an undertone which caused the boss to assume a changed attitude at once. He turned and hurried away without answering, and Mr. Bruington quieted the semi-distracted girl by the assurance that her case would be looked into and justice done her. The floor boss soon came hurrying back accompanied by the next man higher up, the 'tiger,' who was in fact the

active manager of Factory No. 8, the man responsible to the directorate for the net returns of the institution. He knew Mr. Bruington and met him frankly.

"This is the first time I've ever been in this shop, Yates," Mr. Bruington said, "and it's hell, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's hell," Yates admitted. "It's the real thing."

"What's the reason?"

"Dividends; competition between factories to see which can please the board of directors the most. If Factory No. 7 beats Factory No. 8, No. 7 gets all the bouquets. Board of directors drive the managers of the different factories, managers drive the bosses, bosses the help. Economy everywhere, no improvements, no safety appliances—cheaper to buy the ward boss. Dividends, dividends, dividends! There you have it, Mr. Bruington. I'd rather have my children in their graves than working in here. I'd rather be dead myself than work at one of those machines."

"Discharging the girl here because her picture was in the *Times* yesterday?" Mr. Bruington asked.

"Yes, before I was dressed this morning, Block, the General Manager rang me up and called me to a frazzle. Ordered the girl discharged without a hearing. She's one of our best, too, isn't she, Mike."

"She is that, we can't afford to toss off all our good help either. We're running close on this month's output now and it'll hurry us to make our average. If we fail in that, No. 4 is going to be on our heels."

"Well," interposed Mr. Bruington, "here is where the system changes. Right from this moment hu-

man life and bodily comfort and safety are going to take a place higher up than dividends. Slow all these machines down to a positively safe rate of speed, Yates, until we can get the Board together and start new. What do you need worst first?"

"Clear out these dangerous shafts, pulleys and belts. Get us individual motors. Give us a little more floor space so the girls will have a chance to move about a little and give us fresh air. That'll pay its own way. We'll maintain the output, increase it, if the board will give us just a little temporary help."

"Come on Bobby, let's go," said Mr. Bruington.

"You are sure, mister, that they won't check me tonight," the girl who had received notice asked anxiously of Mr. Bruington.

"Sure of it, Miss. Go right ahead with your work, and let me know if your mother should get worse." Mr. Bruington handed her a card.

"It's all right, is it, Mr. Yates?" the girl asked of the 'tiger'."

"Yes, Mattie, don't worry about it any more."

A shrill whistle sounded. The girls moved to their places. The power was turned on and the machines again started up at two-thirds speed.

"You seem to have a lot of influence with that bunch, father," Mickey ventured, as they were riding toward the City.

"Yes," admitted Mr. Bruington, "I'm a stockholder in the company."

Mickey slid down into his seat and looked at his father out of the corner of his eyes; but the father made no further comment; only pretty soon he slid over toward Mickey and threw his arm up over the seat behind the boy's back. Mickey could feel

the gentle pressure of his father's fingers on his shoulder, occasionally. "If you can get away, I wish you and Mamie would run out in the car and see if that girl who was so badly bruised up needs anything," Mr. Bruington suggested finally. "Hand her this," he added, pressing a bill into Mickey's hand, "and tell her not to worry about her job, just to rest and keep good and quiet until she's able to be up again."

CHAPTER XXV.

Nick Delaney was whistling a tune backwards as he tied up a quarter's worth of rice, a pound of 33c coffee, 10c worth of crackers, and a cake of laundry soap. At any rate, Mrs. Delaney always insisted that Nick's whistling music was wrong end to; but that didn't make much difference to Nick, what she said about his whistling. He knew that she didn't mean anything very offensive. He heard Etta's voice faintly crying to him from the third room back, up stairs, and he walked to the stairway at the rear and made an effort to establish an understandable communication with her through that channel. He was expanding his voice in a horrible manner in a fruitless effort to accomplish his aim, when between yells he heard an animated rustle at the front of the store; a sort of a loudly suppressed confusion which caused him to turn at once and greet the beaming presence of Mickey Peck coming toward him followed by a trio of smiling, bubbling, gaily tripping, beautifully dressed, bright eyed, pretty girls.

"Here he is girls, this is Nick!" Mickey exclaimed, and in an instant Nick found himself in the delightful, almost suffocating presence of the four, crowding closely about him.

The thought "what a happy death" flashed across his mind, and then Mickey had him by the hand, and Mamie had him by another hand, and Clara and Edith had their pretty white hands on his arm, and Nick wondered if he smelt of kerosene, and if the girls felt the laundry soap on his fingers, or

the molasses drippings on his sleeves. He really blushed, the first time in many, many years.

"Yes, this is Nick Delaney, girls; the best old friend in the world."

"Oh, we're awfully glad to see you. Bobby has spoken about you so often," bubbled Mamie.

"You look just like he said you would, only he isn't bald-headed, Bobby, only a little bit. You said his forehead went clear back to his neck."

Nick blushed again at Edith's enthusiastic defense of his top story.

"You must be an awfully kind man, Mr. Delaney, if you measure up to Bobby's stories about you," commented Clara.

Again Nick blushed.

"You're so many," Nick finally ejaculated, "that I don't feel able to take care of myself. Who have we with us today, Mickey? I'm a little mixed up as to the identity of the visitors."

"Oh, yes, Nick, pardon me. I forgot that you hadn't met the women folks before. These are a few of my sisters, real sisters."

"Just a sample of them?" Nick inquired, laughingly.

"Well, there's only one more," Mickey admitted; "our little sister. She wanted to come but our parents wouldn't stand for that. I had quite a time getting them to let me bring the three with me."

"He means he had quite a time trying to get away without us," pouted dainty little Clara.

"We've always felt that there was something, or some one, away out here in the western wilds who was calling for Bobby," Mamie quietly remarked.

Nick glanced at Mickey quickly, "The girl with

the blue socks maybe," he suggested; "you'll all like her."

The girls laughed at the rather odd manner in which Nick referred to the girl in question.

He stepped to the foot of the stairs again. "Etta," he called, "come right down. Tell mamma and Nina to come, too."

"Mickey felt a weakness come over him as he heard Nick's words. Soon the scurrying steps of Etta on the stairway told them that the little girl was on the way, and she bounded into the room in a perfect torrent of curiosity to find out what her father wanted. She rushed into Mickey's arms. There was the sound of other quick steps on the stairway; not quite so boisterous as were little Etta's, but girlishly agile.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Delaney, come over and see me." The voice thrilled Mickey. Soon he would again be in the presence of the greatest inspiration his life had ever known. Nina turned into the room, her bright brown eyes sparkling gently, her cheeks tinged with a little flame of red, her lithe, graceful body breathing out its message of superb health. She stopped suddenly and paled a little in the presence of the unexpected guests, for there, too, was Mickey Peck. The last message she had received from him was a delicately done, idealized picture of herself, shown as the one conspicuous figure on a busy street, and with the picture had come a little card bearing only these words: "This from one who will always love you—hopelessly. M. Peck."

What wonder that Nina paled a little and that Mickey, too, found himself almost undone. But Nina recovered quickly. She stepped forward,

glancing curiously toward the other girls, and half-timidly toward Mickey, who now advanced quickly to her and grasped her soft white hand instantly extended to him.

"These are my sisters, Miss Carmen," Mickey explained to the puzzled Nina. "Mamie and Edith and Clara; and the last name is my real last name 'Bruington'."

The girls greeted Nina with smiling, interested, interesting faces and warm hand clasps.

Nick, noting Nina's puzzled expression, hastened to say: "I never did get Mickey's story straightened out in my mind, Nina. I didn't know whether he had any sisters, or brothers, or not. I knew only that his parents had been found and his identity established."

"And you knew my brother Bobby when he was a little boy working on the streets here?" queried Edith.

"Yes, I knew him several years ago," Nina admitted quietly, the first words she had spoken, and the soft even tones of her sweet voice charmed the girls.

"Bobby told me just a little bit about you," said Mamie. "We thank you, too, for your kindness to him."

"My kindness to him!" said Nina, in surprised tones. "It was always the other way. It was his kindness, his gallantry toward me."

It seemed a perfectly natural thing for Edith to crowd up close to Nina and drop her arm around the western girl's waist, and ask her a hundred questions about Bobby's boyhood days.

Nina glanced to Mickey helplessly, and he came to her rescue with the explanation to his sisters

that really Nina and he had not been intimately acquainted when they were small.

"Isn't mamma coming down, Etta?" Nick asked.

"She's got some jelly on the stove and can't leave it for a little bit," explained Nina.

"Come on up, then, folks," Nick insisted, "we've a chair or two upstairs."

"Really, Mr. Delaney, I must hurry on home, mamma is depending on me for some dinner supplies. Will I get to see all of you again—I hope so," Nina addressed the girls wistfully.

"We're in Bobby's hands away out here—whither he leads we all follow, close at his heels," explained Mamie.

Nina moved toward the counter on which her little basket of supplies stood. Mickey anticipated her movement and took the basket in his hand. He and Nina stepped out into the street, followed by the tender glances of his sisters. They walked on in happy, contented silence for a little while. "The street has not changed much since I left," commented Mickey. "Here's the same little lunch counter where I used to stop and grab a hot weiner when I was drifting in at night after my first few days in the *Herald*."

"And just beyond a few steps is the drug store where you used to halt my willing feet and submerge me in ice cream sodas. You remember?" asked Nina glancing up to him piquantly.

"I've forgotten nothing," admitted Mickey. "I remember everything! What you said, how you looked, what you wore, the color of your hat, of your dress, and I remember too how fearful I was always lest I might say something that would not sound right, would offend you."

"Oh, you never did that! No one was ever more kind, or courteous, or considerate of me and of my feelings. You rang true always. I think I can appreciate in a sense how you felt then. Now, I know it is different. One little glimpse of your beautiful sisters tells me wordlessly that now you do not stand in such awe of girls. You know that we are human, that pretty clothes, and red cheeks and happy, careless, thought-free words do not stand for very much after all. But I want you to know," Nina continued, and her words were uttered in a quick, serious manner that aroused a sudden, unnecessary premonitory fear in Mickey's mind, "I want you to know that something else came into my life, was forced in. Papa failed in business. He was caught in the general collapse of western business interests two years ago and I have had to work. I have music classes that absorb my time the greater part of each work day, and papa is struggling as best he can to get started again. So go the fortunes of the world, but I have not been unhappy, am not unhappy. My work has made me happier."

They are moving up the walk to Nina's home. At the door Nina turned to take the basket from Mickey's hand. He still held to the handle and stepped in with her. She looked up into his face, a happy blushing smile overspreading hers. "Of course, I wanted you to come in," she admitted. "Let me take the basket to mamma and I'll be right back." She did as she promised and came "right back," her heart singing a happy song. She met Mickey's extended hands with hers and looked into his face with tear-sparkling eyes as he drew her into his impetuous arms.

"What a strange, wonderfully happy day this has been," Nina said, after a little while. "'No one knows what a day may bring forth.' Now I know how true that is; but I always knew you would come back."

"Knew I would come back?"

"Yes."

"And you would have welcomed me as I was."

"Yes, else I am unworthy now."

"I am the hopelessly unworthy one," insisted Mickey, "but I am not going to press that point."

After what seemed like a very short while a telephone call brought Mickey word that his sisters were patiently awaiting his return, but they were anxious to know what his plans were for them.

"Come with us for a little while," begged Mickey of Nina. Nina called her mother.

"You remember Mr. Peck, mamma?"

"Yes, very, very well. I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Peck. Mr. Carmen and I think a great deal of the pictures which you made for Nina."

"Mr. Peck's sisters, three of them, are over at Mr. Delaney's, mamma, and he wants me to go with them for a while."

"What about dinner?"

"Oh, I had forgotten about dinner."

"She will go with us, Mrs. Carmen, we'll not let her starve."

"Well, she can go, providing all of you will come and take dinner with us some day when we have had warning enough to be prepared."

"That's the happiest suggestion of all," Mickey granted, with a smile. "You have involved yourself now, Mrs. Carmen."

"Aren't you too tired tho', Nina; you worked

hard today," the mother asked with tender concern, but Nina's bright countenance, the radiantly happy expression in her eyes told the mother that she need worry no more.

At the store Mickey ran up stairs to greet Mrs. Delaney, and for a few moments Nina and Nick were alone together.

"That's a family of millionaires, Nina, did you know it?" asked Nick.

"No," replied the girl, her face paling suddenly. "Why, Mickey is still working on a paper the same as he did here. He told me so. He told me that his father is a business man in New York City, but he said nothing about wealth. Oh, it certainly isn't true, is it!" Nina exclaimed.

"Yes, it is true," insisted Nick. "These girls looked pretty classy to me, so I just stepped around to the Commercial Bank just before they closed up and asked one of the boys there to look up the rating of Robert Allen Bruington, Sr., New York City. Mickey is Robert Allen Bruington, Jr., one of the girls told me. Well, this friend of mine looked up Mr. Bruington's rating and said to me, 'Now, Nick, if this man Bruington wants a dollar's worth of sugar or a quarter's worth of prunes on time, just let him have 'em, I think he's all right for a small amount. The book here places him at all the way from eight to twelve millions'. And he read off a lot of stuff to me about Mickey's father's business connections that just about made me dizzy. He's president of one that's capitalized for $20,000,000.00."

Nina turned away, her heart beating painfully. A quick mental review of the afternoon's happenings worried her. She had met Mickey and treated

him just as she would have treated the real Mickey, whom she had known before. She had met him half way, more than half way she feared. She felt a sense of shame, though innocent shame, and then there came defiance into her heart. She was absolutely innocent. She would tell Mickey so, tell him plainly, and let him go his own way, ally himself with the new class to which he belonged. She could not hope, would never care to try to adjust herself to that far away austere class about which she had read so much.

And then she heard the hurrying steps on the stairway at the rear and Mickey, and the beautiful girls laughing and chattering pounced upon her and led her away, down town into the most magnificent hotel in the city. It was not until Edith had upset a cup of coffee on the rarely artistic table covering and been roundly scolded by Mamie for such awkwardness that Nina began to feel herself again, and when sweet little Edith explained that she had been trying just as hard as she could to be as genteel in her table manners as Nina was, then Nina joined with the others in merry laughter, a laughter which helped Mamie to precipitate one of her dishes with a crash to the tile floor of the great dining-room, and in grabbing for it she upset a jar of salad dressing. An obsequious waiter in an instant swept all signs of the catastrophe away, while the hilarious party tried as best they could to suppress their spirits to a reasonably decorous point.

"Let's not try to be as genteel as Miss Carmen is any longer," suggested Mamie, "the results are too disastrous."

Before the evening was over, Nina had banished

entirely from her mind the tragic thought of reconsidering her surrender of the afternoon. The longer she stayed with Mickey and his sisters, the more confirmed she became in her belief that she could not, would not give them up; only, she was determined to have it out with Mickey. And she did have it out with him that night, in the cozy little parlor of her home. She told him all about it; the consternation of her mind and heart when Nick overwhelmed her with his story of the wealth of Mickey's parents; her feelings of shame for having allowed herself to appear so happy in meeting Mickey again; her determination to renounce him and make him go his own way, for she felt that she would never be able to adjust herself to such a life as might be before her.

"But," concluded Nina, "all my heroic vows have come to naught. The evening with you and your sisters has enslaved me all the more. I love all of you—for better, or for worse."

"And you," said Mickey, accusingly, as he held her close in his arms, "you hastened to tell me that your father had met with reverses, and——"

Nina interrupted him smilingly: "Oh, I knew that would make no difference to you Mickey, but it was only justice to you that you should know."

"Please, please don't say anything more about it," pleaded Mickey, "you shame me. You're a four square dealer for fair; as the boys used to say on Eleventh Street. You tipped your game to me and then went it 'blind' yourself."

"Now, that sounds very like old times," Nina affirmed gayly. I don't know what you said, or mean, excepting that it meant something awfully nice. You remind me so much, Mr. Bruington, of

a young man I used to know, who used to make pretty pictures of me, write tender little tumultuous notes to me and send me, anonymously, long after he had withdrawn his ever-welcome presence from me, bunches of beautiful flowers, pretty books and boxes of dainty candies."

"How did you know?" asked Mickey, his face confessing his happy guilt.

"I knew," said Nina.

THE END.